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ELEMENTARY HOMILETICS

OR

RULES AND PRINCIPLES

IN THE

Preparation and Preaching of Sermons

BY

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

FOUR years ago I had printed in pamphlet form some rules and notes in my department of Homiletics, for the use of students in the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Mount Airy, Philadelphia. To these notes others were added from time to time, which, with the examples given under the various rules, became sufficiently copious to appear now in book form.

The book does not claim nor pretend to be a treatise on Homiletics, nor a set of lectures on the subject, in full form. That field is abundantly covered; but there seemed to be need of a text-book giving only rules and explanatory notes, which would form the basis of free lectures, which are always preferable in the department of Practical Theology, and give the instructor every opportunity to make his own additions, comments, and illustrations.

It may also be of helpful service to young ministers, whether they have studied larger works

on the subject or not, in presenting in succinct form those elements and first principles and rules in the preparation of sermons which should ever be kept in view, but are too often overlooked or forgotten. The examples given under many of the rules will aid in understanding their force and meaning.

Consisting, therefore, chiefly of such elements and rules, and intended for those beginning the great work of preaching, I have called this book *ELEMENTARY HOMILETICS*, and as such send it forth to find and fill its place.

JACOB FRY.

PHILADELPHIA, PA., 1897.


PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

AT the suggestion of several teachers of Homiletics who have used this book in their classrooms, I have enlarged some of the explanatory notes and added considerable material, so as to make the rules and principles more readily understood in their meaning and application.

The favorable criticism and hearty welcome wherewith the book was received, and its first edition so soon exhausted, is appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

JACOB FRY.

PHILADELPHIA, PA., 1901.



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HOMILETICS.

CHAPTER I.

DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF HOMILETICS. CHOICE OF SUBJECTS.

HOMILETICS is that branch of theology which teaches the principles and rules according to which sermons are prepared and delivered. It covers the whole subject, science, and art of preaching or public address before the congregation. Students come to theological schools to become theologians, but chiefly to become preachers. Homiletics is therefore the chief aim and end of all theological study; the completion and crown of the whole course.

Preaching is the chief business of the Christian ministry, and the most frequent form of public speech. More sermons are delivered in any year than all other public addresses combined. In this fact there is an element of strength and of weakness; of strength, because of the frequent opportunity to influence public thought and action; of weakness, because this

frequency brings the temptation to become careless in preparation.

There is a wide difference between a sermon scantily prepared and a sermon erroneously constructed. The latter may be found in sermons of elaborate preparation, and is a fault chargeable not to lack of time, but lack of observance of the principles and rules of true homiletics.

The objection that preaching is too sacred to be made a matter of art, and too varied in its topics and ends to be governed by rules and forms, is of no more weight than when applied to any other business or duty. Every sermon has two elements, divine and human. It is divine in its substance, which is the truth as revealed in God's Word; but it is human in so far as it is the product of human learning and skill in its preparation and delivery. As a human product every sermon is a matter of art, and as such demands the highest skill and best method of which the preacher is capable. In both elements it will show the marks of its maker.

Rules in homiletics are meant to aid and not to hinder the best and most effective kind of preaching. "What is worth doing at all is worth doing well," and the greater and grander the work the more important is it to observe this rule. Truth may be presented in such overwrought or stiffened form as to

Initial lesson on how sermons

lose its force and end, but true homiletics will put the preacher on his guard against this as well as other faults by which sermons are spoiled. Every preacher will have some method or rule in his preparation and preaching. The question is—which is the best method and rule? To aid students in finding this out and becoming familiar with it, is the important purpose of this branch of study.

DERIVATION OF THE TERM.

The term Homiletics is derived from the Greek *ὁμιλέω*, signifying both to assemble and to converse together, and is repeatedly used in the New Testament. [See *Luke* xxiv: 14, 15. *Acts* xx: 11, and xxiv: 26. *I. Cor.* xv: 33.] From this is derived the word Homily, which was the earliest form of public discourse in Christian congregations, and from this in turn comes the word Homiletics. The word Sermon, from the Latin *sermo*, has the same signification as Homily, but generally expresses a more elaborate and finished discourse. The term Postils is derived from the first words in the sentence "*Post illa verba textus*," with which many homilies in the middle ages began.

In the New Testament other words besides *ὁμιλέω* are used to express the act and office of preaching. The word first and most frequently used is *κηρύσσω*,

which means to preach, to proclaim, to publish; and the preparation and preaching of sermons has therefore been called by some *keryctics*, instead of homiletics, as expressing more exactly the sense which it is intended to convey.

The two words really describe two different purposes of preaching; *κηρύσσω* meaning the public proclamation of the gospel, while *ὁμιλέω* means the instruction and edification of the congregation of believers. The former word is used no less than seventy times in the New Testament, and was employed by Christ in His great commission to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The word *ὁμιλέω* is never so used, but in the few instances in which it occurs, as above stated, signifies to talk and converse together. Even when employed to describe Paul's preaching at Troas (Acts xx: 11), it is translated "talked with them."

A third term used in the New Testament to describe the act of preaching is *μαρτυρέω*, which signifies to bear witness or testimony. This word is used repeatedly in the first chapter of John's gospel to describe the preaching and office of John the Baptist. Christ uses it in John xv: 27, when He told the disciples "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." Paul also, in his

address to King Agrippa, describes his preaching as "witnessing both to small and great," and in numerous passages employs this word in its various forms.

So important is this phase of preaching, which not only proclaims the gospel, but bears witness of its truth, that a third term, *martyretics*, has been invented to express much more fully than "homiletics," the business of preaching.

A fourth term, *halieutics*, from ἀλιεύω, to be a fisherman, *i. e.*, to "catch men," has been used by some homiletical writers to express another idea of the sermon; that which regards preaching as an art, "fishers of men," the art of persuading or alluring; as when Paul tells the Corinthians, "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile."

But none of these more recent terms has displaced the term Homiletics in general use. Not only is it because it is longer in use, but rather because it expresses more exactly the purpose of the sermon in our church services. The great majority of those who attend these services are believers, to whom the simple announcement or proclamation of the gospel is unnecessary. Their need is edification, information, and further instruction in God's Word. The preaching of pastors who are settled over congregations is chiefly "for the

perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The proclamation of the gospel and the testimony as to its truth are intended for the outside world; for those who have not heard of Christ, or those who have rejected or been indifferent to His gospel. But few of these hear our sermons, and therefore the preacher's aim is chiefly to feed the flock of Christ and to build them up in their holy faith. This is the meaning of *ὁμιλέω*, and the science of preaching is therefore properly termed Homiletics.

Nevertheless, the other terms mentioned should not be ignored or forgotten. Unless the sermon be a special one, all these elements, keryctic, martyretic, and halieutic, as well as homiletic, should enter into it. In ordinary congregations, some impenitent and unbelieving persons will be found. To such, the sermon should be a call and a testimony. It should always aim at bringing souls to Christ, as well as establishing and developing those who are in Him. To have special "evangelistic services" and sermons for the unconverted may have some good results, but it is far better to have every sermon thoroughly evangelical; adapted to those who are without, as well as to those who are within. Thus every sermon will be suited to all classes.

THE ORDER OF PARTS.

Homiletics is usually divided into four parts :

1. Invention, or the selection of texts or topics, and the gathering of material.
2. Disposition, or the division and arrangement of the subject and matter of the sermon.
3. Composition, or the development, elaboration, and style of the discourse.
4. Declamation, or its public delivery.

INVENTION.

The term Invention is derived from the Latin *Invenio*, signifying to find, to discover, to contrive, to procure ; and expresses the act of the mind in searching out a text or theme, and finding out what to say and how to say it. It may be in its beginning an act of the imagination, as the artist sees in his own mind the image before he touches the marble or canvas ; or it may be a discovery, the result of diligent study of the Scriptures, or revealed to us in our own experience and observations of life.

Every sermon, therefore, is either a creation or a discovery. The first comes as the result of careful study of a text or topic selected, gradually growing or unfolding until it takes final shape in

the mind of the preacher. The other flashes suddenly before him as he is reading God's Word or otherwise engaged. Verses and passages quite familiar open themselves unexpectedly, and the sermon is a new discovery; like a man finding a vein of rich ore in a field across which he has often passed, by the simple overturning of a stone.

This inventive faculty or gift of making or finding a sermon should be cultivated and developed by every preacher. It will keep his mind and heart awake and active, give freshness and interest as well as material aid to his sermons, and furnish a constant source of pleasure and delight in his studies and preparations for the pulpit.

In addition to this creation or discovery of the sermon, four other things are usually included under Invention, *viz.*, the choice of subjects, the selection of texts, the determination of the theme, and the gathering of material.

THE CHOICE OF SUBJECTS.

The observance of **the Church Year**, with its various seasons and appropriate lessons from the Gospels and Epistles, ordinarily determines the subject of the sermon at the chief service on the Lord's day.

Luther, in revising and reforming the Order of

worship and public service, retained the observance of the Church Year as it had come down from the early ages of the Christian Church; and while he abolished many superfluous festivals, held fast to the chief festivals and seasons, and their appropriate lessons for each Sunday and festival of the year, selected from the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament.

The sermon should be in the line of the service or the particular thought of each day, unless there be some special and sufficient reason for changing it.

It is of great value that the unity of worship and instruction should remain unbroken.

Occasions, however, will arise and circumstances demand that **other subjects** be preached on besides those contained in the pericopes. This will generally be the case when there is a second or evening service, and quite frequently also at the first or morning service. In congregations where services are held only on alternate Sundays, the preacher must choose which of the lessons is the more important, and be careful that no chief thing of Christ's life or teaching be omitted.

For all such occasions when a choice of subjects outside of the regular selections falls to the preacher, it is important to have some rules and suggestions for his guidance.

SUBJECTS TO BE AVOIDED.

1. Those **irrelevant** to the purpose of preaching. Such as sermons on abstract metaphysics; on natural philosophy and science; the mechanical arts or agriculture; mere social or sanitary questions; partisan politics, etc.

Sometimes there may be need of and propriety in a brief allusion to such topics, but they should never supplant the gospel by being made the subject of an entire discourse.

2. Certain great subjects, belief in which should be **taken for granted**, and which could not be covered in an ordinary sermon. Such as the existence of God; the immortality of the soul; the general evidences of Christianity, etc. Attempts to prove or explain great truths like these often raise doubts rather than confirm faith, and at best produce but little benefit. It is unwise to disturb good foundations.

3. Nor should subjects of **great terror and awe** be made the topics of entire sermons. We are to declare the whole counsel of God and not keep back any of His warnings,—but terrible things should not be discussed too familiarly, but presented as motives in the application of sermons rather than made the chief topic.

4. **Controversial** sermons should be avoided except the occasion be imperative. The pulpit is not the place for the criticism and condemnation of brethren who differ from us, unless the difference amounts to fundamental heresy. Nor is it the place for any personal controversy or grievance a minister may have with members of his congregation.

5. **All sensational topics**, including whatever is merely odd and curious, are to be religiously excluded. The temptation to select and announce such topics to attract a crowd is very great, but it is a confession of pitiable weakness to be compelled to resort to them, and a perversion of God's gospel and grace to employ them.

Not every topic or sermon which creates a sensation, however, can be called sensational preaching. Every sermon ought to produce a sensation in the soul of the hearer, and if it fails to do so it is a weak sermon. The preaching of our Lord produced a sensation which roused the hopes of Israel and the wrath of the scribes and Pharisees. The people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. John the Baptist produced such a sensation when he preached in the wilderness of Judea that all Jerusalem and the region round about went

out to hear him. Paul's preaching produced such a sensation at Antioch that "almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." Luther's preaching produced a sensation which shook not only the hearts of men, but the thrones of empire, from the shores of the Baltic to those of the Mediterranean Sea. In the right sense, it would be a good thing if all our sermons were more sensational.

But if by the term is meant the preaching which aims to be odd and eccentric, which plays with Holy Scripture as with a foot-ball, or which sets aside the Word of God and selects its themes from anywhere and everywhere else,—which advertises itself in bold headlines and with misrepresentations,—which leaves nothing undone to draw a crowd and everything undone to save a soul,—such sensational preaching is worse than weak, it is wicked. It is a perversion not only of the Word of God, but of the whole design and purpose of the pulpit. It is a surrender to the enemy. It is a confession that the gospel is a failure, and that a substitute must be found for it, and that the truth, as it is in Jesus, has had its day, and must be supplanted by something more suited to the public taste. It creates a distaste for the preaching which converts sinners and builds up believers, and a demand for that which will astonish and amuse.

This sort of topics for preaching, like spurious revivals, may overcrowd churches for a time, but is soon exhausted, and then the fearful reaction comes, in which the whole cause of the gospel is made to suffer.

SUBJECTS TO BE CHOSEN.

The whole range of **Christian doctrines and duties**, together with subjects pertaining to **church life and personal experience**, will furnish a great variety of topics which are always proper and profitable.

We have already spoken of the topics selected for each Sunday of the church year. These include the chief facts concerning redemption, both in the life and teaching of our Lord and in the writings of His disciples. But they do not include everything in the New Testament. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness," and none of its facts or teachings should be neglected. The Old Testament also, in its histories, prophecies, promises, and warnings, presents subjects in great variety and of deep interest, as pulpit themes and topics.

In selecting your subject out of this variety, several considerations should guide you.

1. Take the subject which **lies most upon your heart**, and to which you seem to be most drawn.

Subjects of doctrine, duty, or experience will often suggest themselves, and ask and urge a hearing. These may be the promptings of the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth; and out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak readily.

2. Consider the state and **needs of the congregation** and what will be most profitable for them at the time. Not always what you feel like choosing, but what they need, should often decide your choice.

Here the inclination to give preference to church activities may need to be restrained. The need of instruction in certain doctrines which are not understood or appreciated may be greater. Many a preacher shrinks from doctrinal topics because they are more difficult to himself, as well as unpopular with his hearers. This unpopularity may be his own fault. Doctrinal sermons and subjects can be presented in a way which gives them an absorbing interest to any congregation. They lie at the foundation of all Christian life and duty, and their proper presentation will often do more to produce activities in a congregation than if activities only are urged. A simple, earnest sermon on "Christ sacrificing Himself for the salvation of men" may bring out larger contributions than a sermon on "the neglect of church members to pay their just dues."

But whether in the line of instruction in doctrine

or in urging to greater activity and consistent life, the needs of the congregation should be duly considered.

3. Consider what will be **suitable and appropriate** to the occasion ; to the day or season of the year, etc., which would add interest and give special point to the sermon. Such especially would be times of special incidents, calamity, or public concern, etc.

A good sermon will fall without effect if its topic is inappropriate to the occasion when it is preached, and a sermon otherwise very ordinary may produce a lasting and profitable impression because it is in the line of some special occurrence or public attention at the time.

Also days set apart for Thanksgiving or for fasting, appointed by the civil authorities—and also the Sundays nearest the Fourth of July, Washington's birthday, and other national holidays, will give opportunity for sermons of a national character, which may be useful and should sometimes be preached. They should never be of a partisan character, discuss purely political questions, nor criticise the rulers of the land. These occasions should be used to remind the people that our government was founded by Christian men on religious principles, that our national prosperity depends on the continued favor of God, and that our laws

should ever be in accordance with the teachings of His Word.

4. Consider **what has been neglected**. Keep a record or list of subjects as you preach on them, and an occasional examination of this will reveal what important subjects have been unintentionally omitted, which should be presented.

CHAPTER II.

THE SELECTION OF TEXTS.

WHEN a subject has been chosen, the next step is the selection of a suitable text of Scripture as the foundation of the sermon. This order may be reversed, *i. e.*, the text may occur first and decide the topic or theme of the sermon, rather than the topic or subject decide the text. It depends on whether the sermon is to be topical or textual in its general treatment, and the order in which the one precedes and suggests the other is of no account. We placed the choice of subject first, simply because it is the natural order.

Concerning the selection of texts, we give the following rules and statements :

1. Every sermon should be **founded on a text**, *i. e.*, on some passage of Scripture. Only in extraordinary circumstances, as in delivering a discourse on some special occasion or some topic outside the usual range of sermons, should this rule be dispensed with,—as it is better to take no text than to put into one what was never intended.

2. The **advantages and benefits** of having a text are :

(*a*) It keeps us to the true idea of preaching, viz., to explain and enforce the Word of God. A sermon is not a mere religious address or exhortation. It proceeds from the Word of God, leads into that Word, continues with that Word, and attains its highest purpose and end in making clear and plain the meaning of that Word.

(*b*) The text gives strength and authority to the discourse. The power of the pulpit consists in the fact that its occupants can say "Thus saith the Lord." Without this foundation the sermon loses its claim that men should hear, believe, and obey it. The text therefore is the ground and pillar of the sermon.

(*c*) It is a great aid to the preacher in preparing his sermon, and to the hearers in remembering it, as it fixes the mind on some definite statement or expression.

(*d*) While preventing the preacher from wandering away into unprofitable topics, texts of Scripture also furnish the richest variety of thoughts, arguments, and illustrations the mind or heart can desire.

3. The sermon must be **really based upon the text**, the thought of which should run through the entire discourse. It is a misuse of God's Word to

take a passage from it as the text of the sermon, and then make no further use of it or allusion to it. This is making it a pretext instead of a text. On that portion taken as the text, the sermon is constructed and developed. The text is therefore not merely the beginning of the sermon, but that on which it rests for its assertions, authority, and power; and the meaning, spirit, and life of which must pulsate through it from beginning to end.

4. Texts should **neither be too long nor absurdly short**. If a very extended passage is selected (except for Expository preaching), the mind is confused by the variety of subjects included, and the text is not easily remembered. Texts may be very short if they cover the entire theme of the sermon, and give the sense of the passage, *e. g.*, "God is love," "Jesus wept," "Maran-atha," "And he said, Come," etc. But usually to select but one or two unimportant words, as has sometimes been done, seems like trifling with the Word of God and the great business of preaching. A sermon on the New Testament fulfilling the Old was based on the words, "This was that;" and another on Excuses had for its text the single word "But." Such trifling cannot be too severely condemned.

5. Passages should **not be chosen for texts simply because they are unusual and striking**,

if they do not teach what the sermon is meant to set forth. A sermon by a popular preacher, on the value of public meetings in which Christians relate their religious experience and give personal testimony, was based on Ps. cxvii: 2, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Any intelligent hearer who knew the connection and meaning of this passage might be amused, but neither convinced nor edified, by the sermon.

"Run, speak to this young man" (Zech. ii: 4) is a favorite text for sermons on rescuing young men from a life of sin. But that text refers to the prophet Zechariah himself, who was a young man when he prophesied as the servant of God. "I have a message from God unto thee" (Judges iii: 20) is another text which has been used as a call from the pulpit to the unconverted. But the "message" in that text was a dagger with which Ehud assassinated Eglon; surely not a very fit figure of God's voice in His Word. To wrest Scripture in this way, in order to find striking texts, sets the Word of God entirely at naught, pays no attention to its meaning, and brings preaching into disrepute and contempt.

So, too, mere incidental sayings or statements in Scripture, which contain no doctrine or important fact upon which to base an edifying sermon, should not be chosen for texts. Some little incidental

statements may be and are rich in instruction and suggestion, and have been used to great advantage ; but ordinarily it is better and safer to select passages in which truth is more fully and directly taught.

6. It is a **mistake to give preference to Old Testament texts**, rather than those taken from the New. There is a temptation to do this from the fact that Old Testament texts are less familiar, or are generally connected with an attractive story.

But while the entire Bible is our storehouse or armory from which our supplies are drawn, we must not forget we are ministers of the New Testament rather than of the Old.

Old Testament texts may be admirably employed to illustrate the New, but texts which teach positive truths and doctrines are far stronger than those which simply illustrate by comparison or figure. Christian doctrine, duty, and life do not rest on the Old Testament, but on the New, and the latter should therefore be our chief text-book.

7. This brings up the question whether it is proper to use **texts by way of accommodation**, *i. e.*, to select a text for the purpose of illustrating some truth to which the text has no reference or connection. *E. g.*, Dr. Ruperti's sermon on " God's love to sinful man," his text being II. Sam. xiv : 33,

"The king kissed Absalom"; or Dr. Seiss' sermon on "People who start for heaven but never get there"—his text being Gen. xi: 32, "Terah died in Haran"; or Dean Stanley's sermon on "The discouragements of God's servants"—based on the remark of Elijah's servant, "There is nothing" (I. Kings xviii: 43); and many other examples which might be given, for the custom of treating texts by way of accommodation is very common.

The chief objection urged against it is that it is an unauthorized use of the sacred narrative, and puts a meaning into it which was never intended. Is not this as reprehensible as to use an unfinished statement in Scripture as a text, or to wrest it entirely from its connection? If we put a meaning into a passage which evidently was not in the writer's mind, are we really expounding God's Word, or are we making it suit our own fancy? In a word, may preachers accommodate texts to suit their sermons, or are they bound to accommodate the sermon to the text?

These are serious questions, not to be lightly dismissed or overruled. But at the same time we should consider that these objections can be urged against the spiritualizing of the miracles and other acts of our Lord, which has always been regarded as proper when kept within bounds; as the cure of

Bartimeus is an illustration of the cure of those spiritually blind, etc.

Where texts are chosen by way of accommodation and used cautiously and wisely, there is force in the argument in its favor that it opens up the historical parts of the Bible as a rich field for suggestive texts. And it really does no violence to God's Word, provided the truths presented and illustrated thereby are really taught in other parts of the Bible. It is employing the art and power of illustration drawn from the Word of God itself, and attracts attention from the start through the story or narrative on which the sermon is based.

Not necessarily is it going too far to take texts from the Old Testament to show how they are fulfilled in the New. This applies not only to its prophecies, but also to its narratives, histories, and promises. The writers of the Old Testament needed not always to understand the deepest meaning of the sayings they recorded. The full light of the New Testament was necessary to see and understand the real import and significance of the Old. As our Lord's crucifixion revealed the true meaning of Abraham being required to offer Isaac, or of Moses smiting the rock in Horeb, so we can now perceive great truths in much of the Old Testament histories of which the writers themselves may have had no

understanding. It is therefore not only lawful, but commendable, to search those ancient storehouses of Gospel truth, and set our discoveries before our congregations.

Furthermore there is divine warrant for such use of texts in the fact that many things in the Old Testament history were types of the Gospel and are so explained by Christ and the Apostles; as in John vi: 31-35, in which Jesus applies the story of the Manna to Himself; or I. Cor. x: 4, where Paul says the rock smitten by Moses "was Christ"; or Gal. iv: 19, "Which things (Sarah and Hagar) are an allegory"; or Heb. xi: 19, where it is said Abraham received Isaac "in a figure"; and in vs. 26, Moses is said to have "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt," etc.

Under proper limitations, which the conscientious preacher will always observe, the use of texts by way of accommodation, not for teaching but illustrating truth, is justifiable and sometimes of special value. Texts thus chosen cannot be used to teach or establish Gospel truths. Only texts which directly declare and positively set forth Christian doctrine can so be employed. But many incidents and occurrences mentioned in the Bible, aid wonderfully in giving interest and lustre to these truths and

are of great service when used by way of illustration.

8. Another general rule in selecting free texts is to give preference to such as are really **God's words**. Many sayings in the Bible were uttered by heathen or wicked people, those who were God's enemies, and even by Satan himself. Sermons are not unusual on Job i:9, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" the purpose being to teach no man serves God without being rewarded. This is true, but surely Satan ought not to be the person to teach it. Unless the preacher is careful to state whose words they are and why he chooses them, such texts may be mischievous to those familiar with their origin. It would seem strange to take that text when the words of our Lord in Matt. xix: 29, would be more suitable and forcible.

After our Lord's statement to His disciples in John xvi: 12-14, it would not be proper to say that the teaching of the Apostles is inferior in importance to His own. While the words which fell from His lips should ever have the first place, the doctrines taught by His Apostles after His death and resurrection, and especially after the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, must not be held in less regard. The great doctrine of the atonement could not be fully set forth until after the sacrifice had

been made, nor the cleansing power of His blood until that blood had been shed.

But alike in the gospels and epistles, sayings are introduced which fell from uninspired lips, and often from the enemies of the truth, which if used at all as texts must be used with careful explanation. The sayings of Pilate, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, etc. have frequently been taken as forcible texts to show the delusions and excuses of worldly minds, but inspired words uttering positive truths present a much stronger foundation for a sermon.

9. **Texts should not be taken from the Apocryphal books.** While they are printed in some editions of the Bible and have a certain value, they are not the inspired Word of God, and should not be used as texts. For the same reason several passages in the canonical books, like John v : 4, and I. John v : 7, which are now regarded by the best authorities as interpolations, should not be taken.

10. Ordinarily the text of the sermon for the chief service of the day should be taken from the **Gospel or Epistle** for that day, either whole or in part.

These lessons for each Sunday of the year, called *pericopes* (*i. e., taken out of the Scriptures*), are passages selected because appropriate to the particular fact or thought assigned to each day, and embrace

the chief points in the history of redemption. They are of very ancient origin, dating back to the time of Jerome. At the time of the Reformation, Luther retained them, with a few alterations, and their use is still observed in the lessons read at public services because the selection has been judiciously made, completing in the course of each year every essential of our Christian faith.

The advantages of preaching on these *pericopes* may be briefly stated :

(a) It makes Christ the centre and theme of our sermons and presents the chief facts of His life and the doctrines He taught, in regular order once every year. It is therefore eminently Christian.

Every important fact in His life, His birth, public acts and ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension, is thus brought before the congregation in regular order ; and thus what He did and what He taught form, as they should, the great themes of our preaching.

(b) It accords with and preserves the *cultus* and spirit of our church, which bases her order of worship and instruction upon the church year. It is therefore eminently churchly. It has been a mark of distinction by which our church has been recognized, and should not be abandoned without good cause. It may have crippled the freedom of the

pulpit where the law of the land *compelled* their use and allowed no deviation under any circumstances, but that is no argument against their ordinary use under the liberty we possess. We should hold fast to that which the church has decided is good, and preserve the unity of the faith and of the Spirit.

(c) It maintains the communion of saints in furnishing the same topic and thought for all congregations assembled on any particular day. Even those churches which reject the use of these *pericopes*, recognize in their international lessons the value of all believers having the same Scripture lessons or topics of study and prayer on the same day, throughout the world. There is something helpful as well as delightful in knowing that God's children, no matter how widely separated by distance, are united by the same particular phase of gospel truth, and are listening to sermons on the same topic, wherever they are assembled on any Lord's day.

(d) It preserves the congregation from being subject to the special whims, likes or dislikes of the preacher in his choice of texts and topics. He may be indifferent to or prejudiced against some important fact or truth of the gospel, and if left to his own free choice, may never present it to the congregation. Or he may have a fondness for some one class of

texts, and use them continually to the exclusion of others which may be more important. The *pericopes* will furnish the variety which our sermons should have, and are adequate for the presentation of all the essential truths of Christianity.

(e) While thus guarding the interests and rights of the congregation, it, at the same time, saves the preacher the perplexity and loss of time incident to selecting texts at random. Every preacher knows how much valuable time is lost in deciding the topic and text for his next sermon, and it is a great relief and welcome guide when our Mother-Church tells us in advance what is to be our topic and should be our text.

As intimated above, we are very far from believing or advocating the *compulsory* use, by ecclesiastical enactments or otherwise, of these *pericopes* as the invariable texts for the sermon at the chief service of each Sunday. The Word of God is not bound, and Luther made a great discovery in the library at Erfurt when he found there was a great deal in the Bible which was not in the pericopes. Some of the most precious things in the New Testament, *e. g.*, the parable of the prodigal son, the conversation of Christ with the woman of Samaria, the restoration of Peter, the best chapters teaching justification by faith, etc., do not occur in the lessons for any Sunday in the

year, and ought at times to be the subject of sermons. But with the liberty which the church allows for all such exceptions, the ordinary and customary use of the regular lessons as furnishing the texts for sermons, is of great value, as we have shown in the five arguments given, and should not be set aside except for good and sufficient reason.

II. Other texts, not in the pericopes, but appropriate to or suggested by the **particular thought of the day or season** of the church year, may be used to great advantage. Many such texts can be found both in the Old and New Testaments which will bring out such particular thought equally well, and sometimes in more striking form than the pericopes themselves. While maintaining the church-year idea, they give variety and interest to our sermons beyond what is possible when the texts are always chosen from the Gospel or Epistle for the day.

For example, on the first Sunday in **Advent**, texts containing prophecies, types, and promises concerning Christ, will be appropriate; and such passages as

Ps. cxxx : 6. "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning."

Sol. Song v : 2. "I sleep, but my heart waketh : it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying Open to me."

Acts iii : 24. "Yea, and all the prophets from

Samuel, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."

Heb. i: 1-2. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."

Heb. xi: 13. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them and embraced them." A similar text is I. Pet. i: 10-11.

II. Pet. i: 19. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereto ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts."

Rev. iii: 20. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

On the second Sunday, the many texts concerning Christ's second coming will be in place, as well as texts like Luke xviii: 8, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Or xix: 13, "Occupy till I come."

On the third and fourth Sundays, texts relating to the character, mission, and work of John the Baptist will give variety to Advent sermons, such as Acts xiii: 25, "John fulfilled his course."

John i : 7. "The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe."

John v : 35. "He was a burning and a shining light."

In a more subjective sense, texts on the preparation of the heart to receive Christ may be used with good effect during this season.

The **Epiphany** season brings before the congregation not only the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, but His entire public life, ministry, and teaching. Texts referring to Christ as our teacher, example, etc., belong here,—such as Acts x : 38, "Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good." Acts xxvi : 26, "For this thing was not done in a corner,"—on the publicity of Christ's life.

Luke ix : 56. "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Matt. vii : 28-29. "The people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

I. Peter ii : 21. "Leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps."

Matt. viii : 20. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

II. Cor. viii : 9. "Ye know the grace of our Lord

Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

Missionary sermons also are very appropriate to this season, and will suggest numerous texts.

The season of **Lent** is especially rich in appropriate texts, many of which, as in Advent, will be found in the types, sacrifices, and prophecies of the Old Testament. On the first Sunday, which brings before us Christ tempted of the devil, suitable texts will be

Ps. xvii : 4, "By the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."

II. Cor. ii : 11. "Lest Satan should get the advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."

Heb. ii : 18. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted."

I. John iii : 8. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

Texts for sermons on the sufferings of Christ will be found in Isa. liii, and throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews, *e. g.*, ii : 10, 14, 17, 18; iv : 15; v : 8-9; vii : 25-26; xii : 2-3. Lent is also the season for sermons on penitence and humiliation, and on

the trials and sorrows of life, texts for which abound in every part of the Bible.

The **Easter** season, extending to Ascension day, will be found short enough for sermons based on or suggested by our Lord's resurrection. The different appearances of the risen Lord will furnish topics and texts of wonderful interest, as will other passages like

Isa. lxiii: 1. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

Matt. xxi: 42. "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."

II. Tim. i: 10. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light."

I. Pet. i: 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Rev. i: 18. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

So too Rev. v : 5-6. (The lamb changed to a lion.) Heb. xiii : 20-21, etc.

These are but few out of many which might be mentioned to show how other texts besides those in the pericopes can be used, while the church-year thought is carefully observed.

12. As a rule, it is **not wise to choose the same texts** which have been repeatedly preached on before. The wise householder brings out of the storehouse things new and old. Claus Harms's reply to a question about repeating old sermons, was "O sing unto the Lord a new song." His objections to being altogether confined to the Gospels for the day, in the matter of texts, are interesting and forcible. While the extended passages which form these pericopes give great variety of topics of discourse, and therefore are not open to the objection to the repeated use of the same short texts, it is wise often to take other texts appropriate to the particular Gospel, day, or season of the church year, rather than always to use the words of that particular Gospel.

It is hard to make a new sermon on a text frequently used before, and the Bible is very full of new ones which the diligent student is not long in discovering. To choose a text only because it is unfamiliar is a mistake, but the mistake is not much

less to take familiar and oft-used texts when new ones, equally important, appropriate, and instructive can be had for the searching.

13. A convenient blank-book in which to note texts as they occur to your mind in your studies or pastoral work, is a help in choosing texts. The particular thought, purpose, application, or arrangement which strikes the mind at the time, should also be noted.

CHAPTER III.

THE THEME AND MATERIAL OF THE SERMON.— THE DETERMINATION OF THE THEME.

By the theme is meant the subject or topic of a sermon stated as a proposition. It is this propositional form which makes it differ from the mere title of the discourse.

The terms subject and theme are often used interchangeably,—but properly the subject or title is expressed in a single word or phrase, while the theme is a concise statement of what we propose to do with the topic or text announced. Thus on John xiv: 23, the title of the sermon would be, "Love to Christ," but the theme should be, "Obedience to Christ is the best proof of our love to Him." On Prov. xxii: 6, the title would be, "The children of the Church," but the theme "The duty of the Church to educate and train her children." On Rom. v: 1, the subject is Justification, but the theme "Faith in Christ is the only ground of our justification with God."

Sometimes the text itself is expressed in such form and language as to need no further proposition

or theme, *e. g.*, Matt. v: 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Or Matt. ix: 6, "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." These need no clearer statement.

So too the title or topic of the sermon may be sufficiently comprehensive and need no separate theme. On Gal. v: 6, "Faith which worketh by love;" if the title is "The three elements in Christian life," it will be sufficient. So if on Matt. xxi: 28, the title of the sermon is "Laboring in God's vineyard;" or on Rom. vii: 12, "The excellence of God's law," no separate theme is necessary.

USE AND ADVANTAGES OF THE THEME.

The use of a theme as a special feature in the sermon came in with the scholastic method of preaching. As long as preaching kept the form of the homily and was chiefly an exposition of the Scriptures, a particular theme was neither thought of nor necessary. But when the selection of distinct topics for more formal presentation and discussion in the pulpit came into use, some specific statement of the subject to be discussed became necessary after a general introduction, and this was known as the theme of the sermon. It was carefully worded and made sufficiently comprehensive to be the basis of the divisions of the discourse. It was the *propositio*,

out of which sprang the *quæstiones* or chief heads of the sermon, according to the scholastic method of preaching. Sometimes this theme took the form of a question, in which case the answers to it formed the homiletical division.

The theme is a much more prominent feature of the sermon among German divines than among English. In English discourses the division generally is based on the text itself, but in German it is based on the particular theme drawn from the text. One reason for this is the custom among Germans to take the entire Gospel for the day as the text much more frequently than English preachers do. When the same text is used on the same Sundays for a series of years, the inventive faculties of the preacher are taxed to the utmost to discover a new theme or line of thought with which to interest as well as edify his hearers. Hence the theme assumes an importance and occupies a prominence in German homiletics, almost unknown in English.

The homiletical skill of Reinhard, the court-preacher at Dresden a hundred years ago, appears chiefly in the variety and richness of his themes drawn from the same text, as he was required by law to confine himself to the Gospels selected for each Sunday. On the Gospel for the seventh Sunday after Trinity (Mark viii: 1-9), the miracle

of feeding the four thousand, he has the following themes :

“God can and will bring much out of little.”

“The virtue of contentment.” (Their food was very simple.)

“The manner in which God supplies our daily bread is wonderful.”

“How we should receive and give in times of scarcity.”

“Why Christ repeatedly led his hearers to solitary places.”

“The silent influence of goodness.” (They remained three days with Him.)

“Our condition would be miserable if God did not amend the faults into which our imprudence leads us.” (They came without supplies.)

“The remarkable connection God has established between our religious improvement and the supply of our daily wants.”

“Time judiciously expended in religious exercises promotes even our temporal interests.”

“The remarkable fact that the disciples never asked Christ to perform miracles.”

But even among German preachers the theme no longer has the prominence it formerly had. The late Dr. Mann, in his lectures on homiletics, gave this among other rules : “Do not trouble yourself much

about the thema. In hunting after a thema, many a man lost the real nerve of the text. Elucidate and apply your text practically; perhaps all at once a thema will be found. If not, no matter—if only justice is done to the text, and through it to the souls of the hearers.”

Even Luther makes but little of the theme, and states it to be a feature of his sermons that he preached without any thema; the reason being his preaching was largely textual and expository.

Nevertheless, it will aid not only the preacher in his preparation and delivery, but the people in understanding and remembering the sermon, if a definite purpose or line of thought is decided upon and announced before the discussion begins.

There should be such definite purpose in every sermon, and the congregation should know what it is, and to express this is the use and purpose of the theme. It is the trunk of the tree of which the text is the root, and the divisions are the branches. It extends through the entire sermon, and gives it unity and strength.

In textual sermons a theme is less important than in topical, because in textual sermons the object is to explain, illustrate, and apply the text in all its parts; while in topical sermons there is but one subject, and it is important to state our purpose or

mode of treatment in a distinct proposition or theme.

The theme need not always be formally announced. Where the sermon is a discussion of a particular topic, the theme of course should be stated before the discussion begins. But sometimes it is better to let the theme, like the divisions, gradually unfold itself as the sermon progresses. This is especially the case where the announcement of the theme would arouse prejudice or antagonism in the minds of the hearers.

RULES CONCERNING THEMES.

1. The theme must be drawn legitimately from the text. There would be no use in taking a text if this rule is disregarded. The taking of a text simply as a motto or an introduction of the subject is never justifiable. In every case the text is the basis and foundation of the sermon; otherwise it is no sermon. The theme must grow out of the text, and not merely be placed beside it, or ignore it.

2. It should include all the chief points of the sermon. It need not express the divisions in so many words, but should be comprehensive enough to cover the entire discussion. Sometimes the division may aptly express the theme, *e. g.*, "The

Bible: The Basis, the Bond, and the Bulwark of liberty."

3. The theme may take a variety of form and be either didactic, propositional, or interrogative.

[*E. g.* On John xvi: 23-4, the form of the theme may be

(a) *Didactic*.—Our prayers must be offered in Jesus' name.

(b) *Propositional*.—The name of Jesus is essential to the efficacy of prayer.

(c) *Interrogative*.—Why should we pray in Jesus' name?]

4. The theme should be expressed in clear and concise language, in a single sentence.

It confuses the mind of the hearer if the language is involved, and largely nullifies the purpose of the theme. It disposes the congregation to listen with indifference to the sermon, and at the most unfortunate point. If the theme be not immediately and clearly understood, the aim and purpose of the sermon will be lost, and it will be very difficult to gain subsequent attention.

5. Themes should be stated in a way to arouse interest. While careful to avoid arousing antagonism, equal care should be used to make the theme attract attention to the sermon. There is an art in presenting old and familiar subjects in a new form.

Drummond gained many readers of his essay on Charity by giving it the title, "The Greatest Thing in the World." Novelty should not be attempted at the sacrifice of propriety, but there is a legitimate way of putting our themes so as to excite interest as soon as announced. Great care, however, must be exercised to avoid what is merely sensational, or would seem irreverent and offensive to pious minds.

6. Do not attempt or propose too much in your theme. It is not wise to arouse an interest by your theme which your sermon will not satisfy. Do not lay out a larger piece of ground than you are able to build on. Do not propose to do what you have neither the time nor the ability to accomplish.

Limited themes are more popular and of better service than those which are extensive. The subject may be great, but a great subject cannot be fully grasped in all its parts in the limits of an ordinary sermon. It is better to confine the theme and sermon to a single view of it, than to include what cannot be adequately treated. The topics of sermons should generally be great, and not insignificant. But they will need be preached on repeatedly, and therefore one striking view at a time will be the better way to present them.

GATHERING THE MATERIAL.

We come now to that part of Invention to which the term is chiefly applied, the gathering of the material for the sermon. This material is abundant, but it is widely scattered, and the best of it is not on the surface. Men must "dig for diamonds and dive for pearls." Much of this material is hidden, and requires painstaking search and laborious investigation to bring it forth for use. It requires certain mental strength and alertness to grasp, investigate, and gather such material. All nature is full of it, but the preacher must discover and collect it. Much is contained in books, which must be studied and comprehended before their contents can be appropriated. To this end the preacher must have brain-power to penetrate and understand, and will-power to pursue, such studies and investigations until the treasures they contain are secured. Both the capacity and disposition for study are necessary.

And there is nothing more sure of reward than the faithful and persistent pursuit of knowledge. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

There are **five sources** from which proper material for sermons may be obtained.

1. **The Holy Scriptures.** Too often the Bible is used only as a book for texts, and when these are

chosen it is laid aside. The true evangelical preacher, however, seeks in it the best arguments and illustrations for the sermon. He studies its very language and modes of expression, so that as far as possible he may clothe his thoughts in the words of Scripture. It is the chief storehouse from which to get the material of which sermons are made. Familiarity with and correct knowledge of the Bible in all its various parts of prophecy, history, and doctrine is indispensable. No man can be a successful preacher of the Word who is deficient in his knowledge of that Word or of what it contains.

There are three special uses of Scripture in gathering material for sermons.

(a) **Study the text in its original language.** Exegesis is the basis of homiletics as well as of dogmatics, and your proficiency in this will be of great value. The preacher who is content with the common version or translation of the Scriptures will miss many most interesting suggestions of the original, and sometimes fail altogether in apprehending the true meaning of the text. Avoid criticising the received version in your sermon, but bring out the fullness of the meaning of your text. Even if no new points are discovered, the study of the text in its original language develops the mind and gives a scholarly flavor to any sermon.

This examination of the original should not be confined to the text selected, but extend to the entire section or paragraph to which it belongs. A critical examination of the context will sometimes put texts in a new light and give them a different meaning from our previous understanding of them, and we are bound to interpret God's Word correctly according to its true meaning, and not according to our fancy or convenience.

(*b*) **Examine the text in all versions and translations accessible.** The Septuagint of the Old Testament, the Latin or Vulgate of St. Jerome, and Luther's German Version of the Bible demand special attention. The Revised Version of the English translation should always be consulted, and any others which come from scholarly hands should be examined.

(*c*) **Examine the parallel passages** and note any points, explanations, and facts thus given or suggested.

By "parallel passages" we mean not only the few similar passages indicated in the margin, but all other teachings of the Bible bearing on the same topic or subject. These will help to explain, unfold, and sometimes modify the text chosen, as nothing so safely explains Scripture as Scripture itself. Books of Biblical analysis which arrange the chief passages

of Scripture according to topics will be found more valuable in this respect than the ordinary Bible concordances.

2. **Other Books.** Next to the Bible comes the preacher's library from which to gather sermon material. Here the process should be as follows:

(a) **Examine the best Critical and Practical Commentaries** on the text and add their points to those already made. Since English students have access to translations of many of the best German commentaries, as well as to commentaries published in Great Britain and in this country, all the results of the best scholarship in exegetical studies are within their reach.

(b) When the subject is a doctrinal one, your **lectures and studies in Dogmatics** should be reviewed, and the Confessional books of our church re-read on the subject.

(c) Books of **original information**, such as Bible dictionaries and religious encyclopædias; Biblical chronology and geography, with reliable maps; books of travel in Bible lands; a standard life of Christ, and of St. Paul, etc.

(d) **Sermons** and other writings of able preachers. These should be examined and studied especially as to their mode of treatment, discussion, and illustration of the text or subject, and the style of composition.

No preacher who has respect for himself will be content to be a mere copyist, or be guilty of appropriating other men's thoughts, arrangement, or language, without giving due credit. But the proper examination and study of other men's sermons will often suggest and open up to us ideas and methods which will be really our own.

(*e*) Standard books of **history and biography**, religious and secular. Josephus, and Stanley's History of the Jewish Church, and your text-books of the history of the Christian Church will often furnish valuable material; and Rollin's history, Plutarch's lives, and similar works relating to ancient times or persons, as well as modern and more recent works of this class, will give valuable facts for argument or illustration.

(*f*) Some reliable works on **philosophy and science** must not be overlooked. The preacher should keep himself abreast with their advance, discoveries, and theories, not only to meet any false claims to which they may pretend, but to find in them most apt and useful illustrations of Scriptural truth. Instead of sneering at science and scientists, it is better to make use of their discoveries.

(*g*) Familiarity with **the best poets** is of great value to any public speaker, and especially to preachers. Poetry is of near kin to inspiration in

its subjects, lofty sentiments, and manner of expression. Milton's "Paradise Lost" should be read frequently. Its vivid imagery and noble language will be very helpful, as will the writings of other and more recent Christian poets.

3. **The World of Nature.** Every student of God's Word should also be a student of His works. In the world of Nature, God furnishes a vast supply of raw material for sermons; but we must find it and work it up. An intelligent interest in some special branch, like astronomy, botany, geology, entomology, etc., furnishes not only a relief to the mind from other studies, but a charm to hours of recreation and a fund of facts for illustrations which will enrich any discourse. Happy is the preacher who can read the silent testimony of the rocks, trace the glittering alphabet on the evening sky, and who

"Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

4. **Men.** Study human nature. The true preacher seeks not only to understand the history, habits, feelings, conversation, prejudices, temptations, sorrows, and struggles of his people, but to sympathize with them in their situations and circumstances. This gives him power and influence in the pulpit, and at the same time furnishes a storehouse of sermon

material. His observations should not be confined to the members of his congregation; but, in all his intercourse with people of every class and sort, his eyes and ears should be open to gather facts and points for argument or illustration.

To this end, he should mingle as much as possible with men. Women and children are not to be neglected, but often pastoral visits reach these only, and the preacher's topics of thought and modes of expression are apt to be only like theirs, and his sermons fail to interest men. The kind of knowledge most needed will best be gained by getting at the thoughts, hearts, and habits of men, whether in the church or without.

5. The preacher himself. While his own opinions and experience should not be made prominent, they will furnish valuable material. Every sermon should be the preacher's personal contribution to the truth as it has passed through his own brain and heart. Even his own difficulties, weaknesses, and defeats will suggest topics and treatment which may be of value. He who has been in the battle is best able to caution, counsel, or comfort others. He who drinks at the fountain can readily tell where it is located and what is its value. He who bears testimony from his own experience is the best witness.

GENERAL REMARKS.

1. When proper materials have thus been gathered from external sources, let them be thoroughly digested and assimilated with your own thoughts, reflections, and ideas, your own observations and experience on the subject, before you proceed to write out your discourse.

This is where many fail. They gather ample material, but it appears in the sermon as heterogeneous and diversified as they found it. There is no putting things in their proper place, nor assimilating them with what goes before or follows after, or with what the preacher's own brain and heart suggest. The sermon may be full of facts and important truths, but lacks that unity, combination, and correspondence which are necessary to all effective speech.

2. View the subject in all its lights and bearings, and apply to it all questions concerning persons, places, times, manners, etc.:—*i. e.*, ask yourself concerning the text, who? what? where? when? how? why? etc., and the answers suggested will furnish additional material to that already gathered.

As far as possible, transport yourself to the place, age, scenery, and circumstances of the text or of

its writer. Clearness and vividness, as well as correctness, will thus be gained.

3. **The wise preacher will not postpone** the gathering of material until he is ready to write his sermons, but constantly—whether in his library or on the street, in the homes of his people or his travels abroad, when walking among the solitudes of nature or the jostling crowds of busy men, will be always gathering material for sermons. From a full well, water can be drawn whenever needed.

Invention or discovery of truth or of mode of treatment and expression will thus become a healthy exercise of the mind and a delightful part of your work,—will develop your homiletical ability, and make your sermons edifying and full of interest.

4. Always begin this process with **special and earnest prayer** for the aid, illumination, and guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth.

It is the universal custom of preachers, when they enter the church, to ask God's blessing and aid in the discharge of their official duties. But if it be important to have His help in delivering the sermon after it has been prepared, much more important is it to have it in its preparation. "To pray well is to study well," and our sermons would be far more quick and powerful if worked out in dependence on the aid of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

DISPOSITION OR DIVISION.

THE second part of Homiletics treats of the Disposition or proper division of the text or topic of discourse, and the arrangement of the material gathered. It may be called homiletics proper, being the scientific or systematic part in the preparation of sermons.

Rightly to divide the word of truth is among the highest arts and attainments of the preacher, and a strong element of pulpit power. It is a gift in which all do not share alike, but which all should diligently cultivate.

Some recent homiletical writers speak of it as of no importance, and rather a hindrance than an aid to successful preaching. Their argument is that a carefully elaborated plan of discourse gives a stiff and artificial form to sermons, and interferes with that flexibility of mind and style which ought rather to be encouraged and cultivated. But surely the wise preacher need not sacrifice flexibility and variety because he employs a form or plan and works by rule. Who would erect a house or fight

a battle without first forming a plan of action in minute detail, with careful and exact arrangement? No argument is convincing which is not logical, and this which is ridiculed as "homiletical machinery" is simply the application of the rules and methods of logic to the preparation of sermons.

Massillon, when asked which of his sermons he considered the best, replied, "that which I memorized the most readily." It was an answer and judgment worth remembering as the test of a sermon. If it cannot be memorized easily and recalled readily, it reveals a lack of logical arrangement, of clearness of argument, and an absence of skilful plan in which one point naturally suggests and leads to the next. A clear-cut division of the text or subject-matter of the discourse, well expressed, is an element of strength in any sermon. These divisions furnish not only heads of discourse, but handles on which the minds of the hearers lay hold and carry the substance of the sermon in memory.

Doubtless, some preachers make their many and minute divisions and points too prominent in their sermons, which gives them a stiffness that is unnatural and wearisome. This is a serious blunder, but it is no argument against having divisions and points of discourse. No man is expected to go about exhibiting the bones which form the skeleton

of his body, but woe be to his body if there are no bones or if they are out of joint. Nature covers up the bones with flesh and conceals them, but they must be in place and each joined to its fellow.

In public speech, every man will have *some* arrangement or plan of discourse,—he will present one phase or part first, another secondly, and another thirdly;—the only question is—which is the best way? It certainly is easier for the preacher to speak according to a carefully premeditated plan than to indulge in an illogical and disconnected harangue, whilst the influence and benefit to the hearers are of the highest value. After all, it is the man of method, rather than of surprising genius, who does the best work, and on whom the world must rely.

We urge, therefore, a careful cultivation of this part of your work and to aim to excel in it. It will make the preparation of sermons an easy, interesting, and delightful occupation, and give a charm and impressiveness in their delivery which no other feature can do.

RULES FOR MAIN DIVISIONS.

Every sermon has three parts: the introduction, the discussion, and the conclusion. It is in the second of these that the disposition or division of

the text or topic appears; *i. e.*, the different parts are separated and properly arranged for presentation, discussion, and illustration. It is in this the homiletical ability or tact of the preacher will appear, and on it much of the strength and success of the sermon will depend. Before stating and illustrating, therefore, the various methods of division, we give some rules for main divisions, and also some statements concerning the subdivisions into which these main divisions are divided.

I. Main divisions should be few in number.

The purpose of the main division often is simply to state the order and succession of parts into which the text or topic is divided, and these should not be many. Too many divisions weaken a sermon, making it appear as a bush rather than as a tree. The usual threefold division is neither arbitrary nor mere custom; it is both natural and logical, *i. e.*, it is found in nature, and accords with the rules of logic.

The smaller the number of divisions, the truer will the division be, provided the entire text is covered in that division. Where there are many main divisions, some are likely to be really only subdivisions of others. Few divisions secure unity to the sermon, and make it more readily remembered.

If a text requires over four main divisions, it

is better to shorten the text than increase their number. Where a lengthy passage is taken, the various points can generally be arranged as subdivisions, leaving the main divisions to be few in number.

[Thus a sermon on the Beatitudes (Matt. v : 3-12) need have but two general heads,—I. The blessedness of Christianity; and, II. The persons who find it. Or a sermon on the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke xviii : 10-14) would cover all points by this division : I. Wherein they agreed, and II. Wherein they differed.]

2. They should be expressed in **terse form and good language**. Divisions, like themes, should be couched in short, striking sentences, clear and clean cut. A lengthy, indefinite, and carelessly constructed sentence is a blemish anywhere, but especially in the chief heads of a sermon.

In order to gain literary elegance, some preachers have carried their divisions into rhyme; others adorn them by alliteration, etc. Whilst avoiding any extremes which would only interfere with the proper effect of the sermon, elegance of expression should mark the chief divisions.

3. They should **cover or include the entire text**. Every important part of the text should thus be made prominent. Whatever a preacher an-

nounces as his text, he ought to preach on the whole of it, as otherwise it might seem as if he kept back some fact or truth, and failed to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to announce only so much of the Divine Word as your text as you intend to preach on, and let your main divisions cover all you announce. It is not necessary to "exhaust the text," but present all its points.

4. Nothing should be made a chief head of a sermon which is not **in the text or legitimately connected with it**. It need not be directly expressed in the text; it may be only implied in it, but must be connected with it and not be irrelevant to it.

E. g., Rom. x : 9. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." A sermon on the conditions of salvation, based on this text, had four heads :

I. Faith. II. Confession. III. Love. IV. Obedience.

This was incorrect, because the last two are not in the text, and therefore have no place in a division of that text.

5. Nothing should be made a main division which is **properly** a subdivision of another head. Every division should really divide, *i. e.*, be a separate and distinct part, and not implied or covered by another part.

An example of this would be if the text I. John iv : 19, "We love him, because he first loved us," were thus divided :

- I. The love God manifests to us.
- II. The greatness of that love.
- III. The return we should make for it.
- IV. The manner in which we should show it.

Nos. II. and IV. are incorrect as main divisions, they being really subdivisions of Nos. I. and III.

6. There must be **unity of design and correspondence** with each other in the main divisions. They should be like successive halls or chambers or stories of a house, leading naturally and fittingly from one to another. They should be progressive. The preacher should go from strength to strength, and do it without jumping. There should be no dislocating jar as he passes from one division to another, but each should suggest the next to follow. They must also have similarity of form or expression, *i. e.*, if one be a proposition, all must be propositions ; if one a question, all must be questions ; if one a simple title, all must be titles, etc.

SUBDIVISIONS.

1. **The meaning of subdivisions.** Subdivisions are the minor divisions into which the main divisions naturally divide themselves, or consist in such par-

ticular facts, truths, or questions as are necessary to bring out the meaning, discussion, or application of the main divisions.

Such subdivisions may sometimes require sub-subdivisions, in order to present separately the various points contained in them.

2. Advantages of subdivisions. In preaching a sermon which has not been previously written out, there is a great advantage in having minute divisions of the subject, as it will help the preacher to recall the various points he wishes to make, and at the same time keep from repeating what he has already said. They preserve the unity of the sermon and yet keep each thought or point separate and distinct.

3. Importance of subdivisions. Subdivisions constitute the most important part of the sermon. While the main divisions relate chiefly to the mode of discussion or state the order of parts, the subdivisions deal with the subject-matter of the sermon directly. If the main divisions raise questions, the subdivisions must give the answers in solid facts and truths. They are the soldiers in the ranks which do the fighting, and the laborers in the field who do the work. Many preachers are content with preparing an outline with main divisions only, and fail to elaborate the minor divisions which are of far greater importance.

4. **Signs of subdivisions.** These several divisions are usually indicated by different figures or letters of the alphabet, each class or kind of division having the same kind of sign; thus:

AN EXAMPLE OF DIVISION AND ITS SIGNS.

Rev. iii : 8. "*Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.*"

I. THE OPEN DOOR.

(A) *The door described.*

(a) A door of escape.

(1) From our state of sin and guilt.

(2) In which we were hopelessly imprisoned.

(b) A door of entrance.

Into (1) A state of grace,

(2) and salvation.

(c) A door of service.

(1) To proclaim His word and

(2) do His will.

(B) *The way it was opened.*

(a) Not by human power, skill, or merit.

(b) But by the atonement of Christ.

(c) By His resurrection.

(d) The power of the Spirit, through the Gospel publicly proclaimed.

II. ITS PUBLIC MANIFESTATION. "I have set before thee."

(A) *The manner.*

- (a) In the teachings of His word.
- (b) In the institution and services of His church.
- (c) In repeated providential occurrences.

(B) *The purpose.*

- (a) Not for mere admiration, or curious discoveries.
- (b) But for use. That we may escape, enter, and serve.

III. THE EFFORTS OF MEN TO SHUT IT. "No man can shut it." They have tried

(A) *By various means.*

- (a) By persecutions and oppositions.
- (b) By denying Christ's atonement.
- (c) By unscriptural limitations of it.
- (d) By unbelief.

(B) *Without success.*

- (a) The door is still open.
- (b) It can be closed only by Him who opened it.

5. Sources of subdivisions. We give the following sources for obtaining suitable subdivisions, with examples under each :

First. The main divisions often furnish their own subdivisions in the words of the text.

An example of this is seen in II. Tim. iv: 7-8. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Here we have

I. THE LIFE PAUL LIVED.

1. "Fought a good fight." 2. "Kept the faith."
3. "Finished his course."

II. THE PROSPECT HE POSSESSED.

1. A glorious crown. "A crown of righteousness."
2. A grand coronation. "Which the Lord shall give me."
3. A goodly fellowship. "All them that love His appearing."

Second. The context, especially when a narrative, may supply the subdivisions.

Example: Luke vii: 9. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

I. THE CENTURION'S FAITH. It was seen in:

- (1) His confidence in Christ's power (vs. 8).
- (2) The humility he manifested (vs. 6).

- (3) His compassion for his servant (vs. 2).
- (4) His beneficence to God's people (vs. 5).

II. CHRIST'S COMMENDATION OF IT.

It was "great";

- (1) Because of his nationality. He was a Gentile.
- (2) Because of his occupation. He was a man of war.

- (3) Because it was so rare. "No, not in Israel."

Third. The parallel passages sometimes suggest them.

Example: John x : 11. "I am the good shepherd," etc.

I. JESUS OUR SHEPHERD.

1. A great shepherd (Heb. xiii : 20).
2. The only shepherd (Ezek. xxxvii : 24).
3. A spiritual overseer (I. Pet. ii : 25).
4. He seeks and delivers (Ezek. xxxiv : 12).
5. He feeds, sustains and leads (Isa. xl : 11).
6. He rewards and honors (I. Pet. v : 4).

II. JESUS OUR SACRIFICE.

1. By death (Heb. ix : 12).
2. There is no other (Heb. ix : 26).
3. It was sufficient (Heb. ix : 14).
4. It was vicarious (Rom. v : 6).
5. It was universal (II. Cor. v : 15).
6. It was from love (Rom. v : 8).

Fourth. When the text refers to any historical event or fact, the particulars of such event or fact will furnish subdivisions.

Example: Luke xvii: 32. "Remember Lot's wife."

[This refers to the narrative recorded in Gen. xix., and from its perusal we gain the subdivisions.]

I. REMEMBER HER ADVANTAGES.

1. The wife of a religious man.
2. Entertained angels.
3. Heard their message (vs. 12).
4. Saw their power (vs. 11).
5. Was delivered from Sodom (vs. 16).

II. REMEMBER HER SIN.

1. Seemed a small thing. She "looked back."
2. But was a violation of a direct command (vs. 17).
3. Revealed the state of her heart.

III. REMEMBER HER PUNISHMENT. "She became a pillar of salt" (vs. 26).

1. It was swift.
2. It was severe.
3. After she had escaped from Sodom.
4. A warning to others. (Idea of "a pillar.")

Fifth. When the language of the text is figurative, good points for subdivisions may be

indicated by the figure employed. [Care must be had, however, not to carry such figures or points of comparison to extremes which may be ridiculous.]

Example: Matt. v: 15. "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick," etc.

Here are three suggestive figures or comparisons:

I. THE CANDLE. This suggests:

1. Our religion must be luminous.
2. It must be delightful and attractive.
3. It is limited. Christ is the Sun; Christians are only like candles or lamps which must be lit, and give only limited light.

II. THE BUSHEL. Many cover their religion with:

1. Common things. Bushels are familiar things.
2. Unsuitable things. Most excuses are ridiculous.
3. Especially with business matters. "Bushels" are business utensils. Business often obscures a man's religion.

III. THE CANDLESTICK.

1. Our religion should be conspicuous.
2. Well-fitted and consistent.
3. Always convenient for use.

Sixth. When a main division requires definition, argument, or proof, such various definitions, arguments, or proofs will furnish the subdivisions.

Example: Matt. xvi: 16. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The theme here is the divinity of the Saviour.

I. ITS DEMONSTRATION.

1. From the prophecies He fulfilled.
2. The truths He proclaimed.
3. The deeds He performed.
4. The triumph He achieved.

II. ITS DEMANDS.

1. Our faith and trust.
2. Our submission and compliance.
3. Our consecration and service.
4. Our adoration and praise.

Seventh. Things implied in or inferred from the text or the main divisions will supply proper subdivisions.

Example: Ps. xvii: 15. "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."

I. THE THINGS IMPLIED IN THE TEXT.

1. This world cannot satisfy the soul.
2. Even though our circumstances be as favorable as those of the Psalmist King.

II. THE THINGS TAUGHT IN THE TEXT.

1. There must be an awakening in His likeness.

This takes place (a) When we become believers
(Eph. v: 14).

(b) At our resurrection (Phil.
iii: 21).

2. This will fully satisfy. Because

(a) We shall be with Him.

(b) We shall be like Him.

III. THE THINGS INFERRED FROM THE TEXT.

1. Be not overcome with the disappointments of life.

2. It is high time to awake out of sleep.

3. Blessed are they who awake in soul before the final awakening.

CHAPTER V.

METHODS OF DIVISION.

THERE are five methods of Disposition or Division commonly employed in the arrangement of subject-matter of sermons, viz.: the Analytical or textual; the Synthetical or topical; the Propositional; the Interrogative; and the Expository. To these others might be added, such as the Accommodational, Historical, Narrative, etc.,—but their mode of arrangement would come under one of these five mentioned.

Really there are but two methods, the textual and the topical, because every sermon is intended either to explain a text or discuss a topic. Propositional or Interrogative sermons are really topical, and Expository must necessarily be textual. We adhere, however, because customary, to the five methods specified, and take them up separately.

I. THE ANALYTICAL METHOD. (*Textual.*)

1. **Its Meaning.** By this is meant the separation of the text into its various parts for purposes

of examination and consideration, and founding on these the heads of discourse.

2. **Its Value.** The analytical method is :

(*a*) **Eminently Scriptural** because it deals directly with the text. This is the true idea of preaching, and distinguishes the sermon from the essay, dissertation, or address. The purpose of the sermon is to open up and explain the Word of God, which this analytical method does.

(*b*) **It is very instructive.** It opens up what may be concealed, by taking texts apart for minute examination. There is a meaning in many texts which does not lie on the surface, and can be brought to light only when each important word or part of the text is carefully examined and explained.

(*c*) **The division is easily remembered** by both preacher and hearer, as all the main points are in the text. Each member of the text furnishes a head of discourse and cannot be forgotten, for it lies before him. Attentive hearers always remember the text, and if the division be textual, these divisions are more readily retained and the substance of the sermon with them.

(*d*) **This method clothes the sermon with authority.** Its purpose is to show not the

preacher's learning, but what God says to men. It is the mode therefore preachers should most frequently use, because the sermon has authority over men just in proportion as it is not the word of the preacher, but the word of God.

Our commission is "preach the word;" and the analytical or expository method is the best way to fulfil this commission.

3. **Its methods.** (*a*) Select the **chief words** in the text, separate them and make each the basis of a head of discourse. This applies to simple texts and may be thus illustrated:

Matt. xxi : 28. "Son, | go work | to-day | in my vineyard."

There are four chief words in this text—Son, Work, To-day, and Vineyard. These should be separated as above shown and made the basis of the heads of the sermon—thus:

- I. The Title Given, "Son."
- II. The Duty Required, "Go work."
- III. The Time Specified, "To-day."
- IV. The Place Designated, "In my vineyard."

Other examples would be as follows:

Luke xv : 2. "This man | receiveth sinners | and eateth with them."

The chief words of this text are—This Man,

Sinners, and Eateth. This gives three heads of discourse, viz. :

I. The Receiver, "This man," *i. e.*, Christ.

II. The Received, "Sinners."

III. The Reception, "Eateth with them," *i. e.*, a friendly welcome.

Matt. xi : 28. "Come unto me | all ye that labor and are heavy laden | and I will give you rest."

We cannot draw a dividing line after "labor," because that and "heavy laden" are subdivisions of the same expression. So we have but three chief heads, viz. :

I. The person inviting. "Come unto me,"—Christ's call.

II. The people invited. "Ye that labor and are heavy laden."

III. The promise given. "I will give you rest."

Gal. v : 6. "Faith | which worketh | by love."

Here we have a definition or description of Christian life.

I. In its principle. "Faith."

II. In its operation. "Which worketh."

III. In its motive. "By love."

The analytical method may, therefore, be described as the act of taking texts apart for the

purposes of examination and consideration, and then putting them together again in homiletical order and phraseology.

This phraseology should not always be similar, but should be varied in style of expression.

Thus Heb. ii : 18. "For that he himself | hath suffered being tempted | he is able to succor them that are tempted."

The usual phraseology would be :

- I. The person spoken of.
- II. The fact mentioned, and
- III. The assurance given.

But it would give desirable variety to express them in this manner :

- I. The Saviour subjected to temptation.
- II. Suffering through that subjection.
- III. Succoring through that suffering.

This order of parts need not be the order in the text, but should be governed by rules of logic, propriety, and fitness. In the first text given above, the word "Son" might be taken not simply as a Title, but as a Motive for obedience, in which case it would properly form the last instead of the first head of the sermon.

Some examples will illustrate this :

Isa. xii: 3. "Therefore with joy | shall ye draw water | out of the wells of salvation."

Here the order must be reversed, as we must first speak of the wells before we describe the act of drawing water from them, or the delight with which it is done.

Eph. ii: 8. "By grace | are ye saved | through faith."

In this text a logical treatment requires the last term must be discussed before the second. It then presents the way of salvation:

- I. In its Source, "By grace."
- II. Its Process, "Through faith."
- III. Its Result, "Ye are saved."

John xiii: 17. "If ye know | these things, | happy are ye | if ye do them."

Here the second becomes first, and the third becomes last.

- I. The things referred to.
- II. Our knowledge of them.
- III. Our obedience to them.
- IV. Our happiness in them.

In such verbal analysis only such words as form a distinct part or idea should be so separated and used.

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This would give two main divisions or heads of discourse :

- I. What Jesus did. "Put forth his hand and touched him."
- II. What Jesus said. "I will, be thou clean."

But if the whole verse constitutes the text, the division or separation of the text would be

"And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean | And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

We would still have but two heads, but the division would be at a different point and would give us :

- I. The methods of Christ's healing. 1. By touch. 2. By word.
- II. The efficacy of them. 1. The Leper was cleansed. 2. Immediately.

Another example will be found in Acts 12 : 6. If we take only Paul's question it would be divided according to its chief words, thus :

"Lord, what | wilt thou | have me | to do?"

- I. It was submissive, "Wilt thou?"
- II. Unconditional, "Lord, what?"
- III. It was personal, "Have me."
- IV. It was practical, "To do."

But if the entire verse is taken, the division must be based on its clauses, thus :

“And he trembling and astonished | said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? | And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

Here are three clauses requiring separate treatment :

- I. The state of his mind.
- II. The question he asked.
- III. The reply he received.

A fourth example of division by clauses is this :

Rom. x : 9. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, | thou shalt be saved.”

At first it may seem there ought to be a dividing line drawn also after the name Jesus, which would divide the text into three parts. That would be incorrect, inasmuch as what precedes and follows that point are of the same class. Both are conditions on which the assurance in the last clause is based. So we have but two main divisions :

- I. The two conditions. 1. Faith in the heart.
2. Confession with the mouth.
- II. The assurance, “Thou shalt be saved.”

We add another illustration :

Rom. viii : 32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, | how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?"

This would seem to require at least four divisions, yet a careful examination will disclose but two parts :

I. The fact stated. God gave his Son for us.

II. The inference drawn. Then nothing we need will be withheld.

When a text has been determined upon, it is easy to note whether it is a simple, *i. e.*, single statement, truth, or fact, or whether it has several parts or clauses which should be taken separately. In the latter case the division should be according to these clauses, while in the former it should be according to the chief words.

II. THE SYNTHETICAL METHOD. (*Topical.*)

I. Its meaning. The term *Synthetical* is derived from the Greek words *σύν* (together) and *τίθημι* (to put or place). It is the opposite of *analysis*, which is derived from *αναλύω* (to separate or take apart). The *Analytical* method separates the text into its distinct parts, while the *synthetical* brings together from various sources whatever bears upon the text

and aids in its presentation. It is the method of combination.

As the analytical is also called the *textual* method because it deals directly with the words of the text, so the synthetical is also called the *topical* because it deals with the topic or theme of the sermon rather than with the text itself. It treats the text as a whole, and makes the general ideas which its discussion requires or its presentation suggests, the basis of its divisions.

2. **Its advantages.** This method has its advantages.

(a) It insures **unity**, as the sermon is confined to one topic. While this feature of unity may and should be observed in the analytical or textual method, the text often contains several distinct items demanding presentation and discussion, and the attention of the congregation is divided between them. The text Mark xvi: 16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," presents both faith and baptism for consideration. But where baptism is the one topic of a sermon, the whole discussion and entire sermon is given to it, and unity is secured to a far greater extent than where a text is taken for analysis.

(b) It allows a more **thorough discussion**, being of more logical character and completeness.

The entire sermon is devoted to but one topic, which can be presented in all its fulness without exceeding the usual limits of a discourse. .

(*c*) It is more rhetorical. It furnishes opportunity for the use of the stores of knowledge the preacher has acquired; for extended quotations, and literary embellishments, and for the exercise of any special gifts or talents he may possess.

(*d*) Being largely argumentative, the arguments can be readily reproduced in other sermons teaching the same doctrine or duty.

This is not to encourage the frequent repetition of sermons, but circumstances will arise which require an unexpected withholding of the sermon prepared, and the substitution of another on very short notice. Textual sermons are much more readily recognized than topical, the latter being of a more general character, and adapted to a variety of texts.

3. *Its use.* This method applies to and suits

(*a*) Texts which are so beautiful and harmonious in their form and finish, that any separation of parts would spoil them. Like flowers they lose their fragrance and beauty when taken apart. They are like precious pearls, to be treated as a whole, and held up and turned on their different sides for admiration and contemplation.

(b) Texts which do not admit of the analytical treatment, such as short texts containing a single fact or truth; *e. g.*, "God is love,"—"Jesus wept,"—"Pray without ceasing,"—"Quench not the spirit," etc.

While the analytical treatment might be used and we could speak first of the Person mentioned, and secondly of the fact declared, etc., it is better to deal with the topic they present; *e. g.*, The character of God; The tears of Christ; Constancy in prayer; Our treatment of the Holy Spirit, etc., in the fuller way topical treatment allows.

Even many texts which are not short are yet so simple in statement and plain in their meaning as to make any analysis or separation unnecessary and injudicious, and can be more profitably treated in the topical way.

Example: John iv: 9. "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

This requires no analysis to bring out its meaning, but can be much better treated topically, thus:

The evil of prejudice:

I. It is very common. II. Very powerful. III. Very mischievous.

Another example is found in Eph. iv : 13. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This is very full, and seems to demand analysis that its richness may be fully developed and displayed. But it is a gem which would be injured by the cutting, and should be treated in its entirety, thus :

Perfect Manhood :

- I. In the measure of its stature.
- II. In the means of its development.
- III. In the marks of its attainment.
- IV. In the motives of its pursuit.

(c) Sermons on Biblical characters. The many persons whose characters and lives are given in the Bible furnish interesting and instructive subjects for sermons. Rarely, however, does a single text contain all the characteristics or points the preacher wishes to make prominent. He must therefore take the synthetical or topical method of treatment.

(d) Topical sermons, *i. e.*, sermons on some specific doctrine or duty, or on some prevalent error or sin in the community. In such cases the preacher will need a number of Scripture passages

as proofs, and therefore should not be confined to one as in a textual sermon. Care must, however, be taken that the passage chosen for the text fairly teaches the topic or theme, and justifies the treatment and argument of the sermon.

4. **Its treatment.** This method admits of variety of treatment.

(a) If it be a **doctrine**—like justification—the atonement, etc., the divisions and chief heads may be

I. Its Meaning. II. Its Proof. III. Its Effect.

Or the Fatherhood of God—the love of Christ, etc.

I. Its Demonstration. II. Its Delights. III. Its Demands.

Or God's compassion, forbearance, etc.

I. Its Lines. II. Its Limitations. III. Its Lessons.

(b) If it be a **festival**, like Christmas, Easter, Reformation, etc.

I. The facts described. II. The truths established. III. The lessons inferred.

(c) If it be some **duty or virtue** enjoined, like charity, humility, etc.

I. The Duty Explained. II. Exemplified. III. Enforced.

Or I. Its Meaning. II. Its Manifestations. III. Its Motives.

(d) If some **prevalent sin**, like profanity, fraud, strife, etc.

I. Its Prevalence. II. Its Wickedness. III. Its Consequences.

Or I. Its Cause. II. Its Character. III. Its Cure.

Or I. Its Source. II. Its Course. III. Its End.

These topics will suggest a number of texts, each of which would be equally suitable and appropriate. The introduction should set forth the occasion and meaning of the text, and lead easily and naturally to the topic and its treatment.

CHAPTER VI.

METHODS OF DIVISION (*Continued*).

III. THE PROPOSITIONAL METHOD.

1. **Its meaning.** By this is meant that mode of Division which takes the form of propositions or observations. The beginning of the sermon is occupied in an explanation of the text, from which certain propositions, observations, or inferences are drawn which are made the heads of the discourse.

The difference between these terms may be thus defined:

A Proposition is a statement made for consideration, proof, and acceptance. It is a complete sentence, consisting of a subject and predicate united by a copula, *e. g.*, "the Bible is true."

An Observation is the expression of an opinion or judgment, *e. g.*, "sin is destructive of happiness."

An Inference is a statement drawn from another which is admitted; *e. g.*, because Christ stilled the tempest, the inference is drawn, "He can calm any trouble."

These propositions may be entirely distinct from

each other; but it is a gain if they can be stated in the form of a syllogism, *viz.*, two premises and a conclusion; *e. g.*, on Ex. xxxiii: 18-19. I. Moses desired to see God's glory. II. God proposed to reveal to him His goodness. III. This goodness was of more value to Moses than a sight of God's glory.

2. **Its Recommendations.** Several considerations join to recommend this method:

(*a*) It possesses all the advantages of the topical method as specified under that head, as it deals with the topic as directly as with the text.

(*b*) It has the additional recommendation of being more complete and elegant in style. Instead of specifying its divisions by a word or two, each head is a full sentence, which is more satisfactory and more pleasing to the hearer, as it gives both strength and elegance to the discourse.

3. **Its treatment.** There are two ways of using this method:

(*a*) Where the text does not require much explanation, such explanation should form the Introduction of the sermon, and then the observations or propositions will follow as the chief heads of the discourse.

Examples: Acts xxii: 16. "And now, why tarriest thou?"

I. There are some things for which no man can be tarrying.

(*E. g.*—Inducement, opportunity, warning, invitation, etc.)

II. There are some things for which some may be tarrying.

(*E. g.*—For righteousness—for company—more feeling, etc.)

III. There is nothing for which any need be tarrying.

(Because Christ has removed every obstacle, and made every provision.)

Luke ii: 49. “Wist ye not that I must be about my father’s business?”

I. God has business on earth.

II. His children must attend to it.

III. It is time to be about it.

Matt. v: 23–24. “If thou bring thy gift to the altar,” etc.

I. God’s people must come to God’s altar.

II. None must come there empty-handed.

III. Our gifts must be offered in the right spirit.

I. Sam. ii: 25. “If a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?”

I. Against the Lord there are sins.

II. Against sin there is judgment.

III. Against judgment there is entreaty.

(*b*) If an extended explanation is necessary, it will be better to make it a separate part of the sermon, and to divide thus : I. The text *explained*. II. The text *applied*. Then under the latter head bring in the various propositions or inferences as subdivisions.

Example : Matt xx : 8. "Call the laborers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first."

I. The text explained.

1. The purpose of this parable.
2. The meaning of its terms.

II. The text applied.

1. God's rewards are for laborers.
2. All service done for Him has a reward.
3. This reward comes at evening.
4. In it no distinctions are made.

We add other examples of this third method of division. The following is by Dr. Krauth :

Isa. xxi : 11-12. "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night." [After explaining the prophecy

and applying it to our times, he based the discussion on the following propositions :]

I. There are nights and mornings to both God's friends and foes.

II. To God's friends a morning cometh which will have no night.

III. To God's foes a night cometh which will have no morning.

We give two examples of this method by Dr. Seiss :

Gal. vi : 14. " God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc.

I. What Paul might have gloried in, but did not.

II. What he was not likely to glory in, but did.

III. What led him to glory in what he did.

The other is on Acts iv : 23. " And being let go, they went to their own company."

I. We are all more or less under restraint.

II. These restraints are often relaxed.

III. Times of relaxed restraint reveal the true character.

Robert Hall, one of England's eminent preachers in his day, frequently employed this method.

On Deut. xxxiii : 25, " Thy shoes shall be iron

and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be," his divisions are: I. God's people must often endure heavy trials and tread rough paths. II. The prospect of these is apt to dismay them. III. But in them they are assured of all-sufficient strength.

Spurgeon has a sermon on John xix : 5. "Behold the Man!"

I. The text explained.

II. The text applied.

1. Let us contemplate Christ suffering to instruct our minds.
2. To excite our emotions.
3. To improve our lives.

William Jay, of England, whose sermons generally are models of homiletical arrangement, has the following:

Acts xviii : 27. "Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace."

I. Christians are believers.

II. They believe through grace.

III. They need help.

IV. This is afforded by the ministry of the Gospel.

Another illustration of this method we take from

an unknown source: John i: 5. "The light shineth in darkness."

I. The light of truth shineth in the darkness of error.

II. The light of righteousness—in the darkness of sin.

III. The light of life—in the darkness of death.

IV. THE INTERROGATIVE METHOD.

1. **Its meaning.** By this is meant that method of Disposition or Division which is expressed in questions. It relates almost entirely to the form, and may be used in either textual or topical sermons. This method was frequently used by the church-fathers who applied the following questions to their texts or topics, and made them the heads of discourse: Quis,—Quid,—Quibus,—Quo,—Quomodo,—Quando,—Ubi,—Cur, etc. Of this kind are the divisions of Bernard in his sermon on I. Thess. iv: 16. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." I. Quis veniat? II. Unde? III. Quo? IV. Quando? V. Quomodo? VI. Adquid?

Similar queries can be applied to many texts, and will form the heads of the sermon.

2. **Examples.** Matt. xxi: 28. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

I. Who? God's children = "son." II. What?

"Go work." III. When? "To-day." IV. Where? "In my vineyard."

Heb. xi : 2. "For by it the elders obtained a good report."

I. Who? "The elders." II. What did they obtain? "A good report." III. How? "By it," *i. e.*, by their faith.

Eph. iv : 30. "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

I. Whom? The Holy Spirit. II. What? Grieve not. III. Why? By Him we are sealed.

Matt. xi : 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

I. Who shall come? The heavy laden. II. To whom? To Jesus. III. Why? To gain rest.

3. Its advantages.

(a) It is the **simplest** and easiest method the preacher can employ in dividing his sermon, and is readily understood by his hearers.

(b) Interrogatories naturally **awaken interest**, because demanding a reply, and thus a great point is gained in securing attention to the discussion.

A sermon on faith may thus be divided: I. Its Nature; II. Its Means; III. Its Importance. But if these were stated interrogatively thus: I. What is faith? II. How can we get it? III. Why

should we have it?—a greater interest is at once awakened in the subject.

(*c*) It gives **clearness**, especially in argumentative or philosophical sermons, both in the presentation of the subject, and in its subsequent discussion.

(*d*) It may be made a very **practical, pointed and direct** method of applying truth to the conscience, throughout the entire sermon.

For example, a sermon on Rom. xiv: 12: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God," would be of this sort if divided thus:

- I. Who art thou? God's friend or foe.
- II. Whither goest thou? On to judgment.
- III. What preparation hast thou made?

(*e*) It was the **ancient Socratic** manner of instruction; it is the church's method of catechization; and the **natural form** of investigation, discussion, and expostulation.

In the use of this method, great caution is necessary not to raise questions the preacher cannot answer, and to avoid all questions which are inappropriate or merely curious.

4. **Its use.** This method may be employed in three ways:

(*a*) In expressing the **main divisions** of the

sermon. In this case the answers to these questions will form or suggest the subdivisions.

Examples: John xi: 28. "The Master is come and calleth for thee."

I. Who is come? II. Whom does He call?
III. What does He want?

I. Pet. iv: 17. "What shall the end be of them who obey not the Gospel of God?"

I. What is the Gospel of God? II. Why do some disobey it? III. What will be their end?

Acts ii: 47. "The Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved."

I. Who added to the church? II. Whom did He add? III. To what did He add them? IV. When was this done?

Ps. xix: 12. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

I. What are secret faults?
II. How can we be cleansed from them?
III. Why should we be concerned about them?

Ps. li: 10. "Renew a right spirit within me."

I. What is a right spirit?
II. How can it be renewed?
III. Why should we seek it?

Luke xxiii : 42. "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom."

I. Whose prayer was this?

II. When was it made?

III. What did it ask?

(*b*) When the main divisions are in the shape of statements, the **subdivisions** may take the interrogative form. This is often its better use, as it thus reaches the substance of the sermon and aids in its discussion.

Examples: Ps. lxxiii : 24. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

I. Our present guidance. 1. *Who?* "Thou."
2. *How?* "With thy counsel." 3. *Whom?* "Me"—a personal matter.

II. Our future reception. 1. *Where?* "To glory."
2. *When?* "Afterward." 3. *How?* "Receive,"—a friendly welcome.

II. Sam. 18 : 29. "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

I. The perils of young men. 1. What are they?
2. How do they imperil?

II. Their safeguards. 1. What are they? 2. How can they be gained? 3. Why should they be secured?

Luke xxii : 61-62. "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter," etc.

I. Peter's sin.

1. What was it? 2. How do we account for it?
3. Who now imitate it?

II. Peter's sorrow.

1. What produced it? 2. How was it manifested?
3. What does it teach us?

(c) The Interrogative form may relate only to the **theme**,—yet so affect the entire sermon as to classify it under this method. This is especially the case when the answers to the interrogative theme furnish the main divisions of the sermon.

Examples : Luke xix : 41. "When he was come near he beheld the city and wept over it."

If the theme be expressed as a question,—Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem? the answers would form the following main divisions : I. Because of its sin ; II. Because of its unbelief ; III. Because of its doom.

Acts ix : 26. "When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples."

If the theme be worded,—Why should believers join the church? the answers would be, I. Because Christ requires it. II. They need the church. III. The church needs them.

The main divisions being answers to a question, places the treatment under the Interrogative method.

V. THE EXPOSITORY METHOD.

1. **Its meaning.** The Expository method consists in the explanation, discussion, and application of whole chapters, or more or less extended parts of Scripture, instead of selecting a single verse or short passage as the text of the sermon.

2. **Its advantages.** The chief arguments in favor of this method of preaching are :

(a) It is the **primal idea** and purpose of preaching.

The fundamental idea of preaching is not sacred rhetoric. It is the opening up (*ex-pono*), the setting out or putting forth of the contents of God's Word. It is making the vision plain, so that the people may understand it. It is not so much the discussion of religious truth, as its presentation.

(b) It is of **ancient usage**. Many sermons which have come down to us from the earlier ages are of this sort. The custom of founding a sermon on a short and detached sentence or statement of Scripture was unusual and possibly unheard of until after the fifth century. The original purpose of preaching was to explain the plan of salvation or some entire section of the Bible.

(c) It secures a **better acquaintance** with the contents of the Bible, to both preacher and hearers. It makes the preacher "mighty in the Scripture," and this Sword of the Spirit becomes his familiar and effective weapon. It requires careful study, for he cannot omit or escape the difficult passages which come in course, but must meet and explain them.

(d) It affords opportunity to **speak on subjects** which otherwise would or might be omitted or neglected. It brings out the whole counsel of God, and justifies topics, like sins of lewdness, etc., which could not be made special subjects of sermons without offence.

3. **Its methods.** It may be used in two ways, either of which will be to edification.

(a) **In pure exposition.** Thus an entire chapter or an entire Epistle or other Book is taken, explained, and applied, verse by verse, in a series of discourses.

Expository sermons are necessarily largely exegetical and take the form of a practical commentary. Luther on Galatians and other parts of Scripture is an excellent example and model of Expository discourse. Dr. Seiss on Leviticus, and Robertson on Corinthians may also be profitably studied as examples in which the leading thoughts of the

various chapters or sections, instead of every verse, are presented and applied.

(*b*) **In historical or biographical discourses.**

Instead of a continuous exposition of some book of the Bible, this plan selects some prominent event or person as the topic of discourse, and reproduces the Bible narrative in the preacher's own language, with suitable comment and application as the story unfolds. Such topics are found, *e. g.*, in the history of the antediluvian world; in the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan; or in the planting of the Christian church as given in the Acts. Intensely interesting and instructive discourses of an expository sort can be produced when they take the **biographical** form; such as a series on the life of Abraham or of Jacob; the story of Joseph or of Esther; the life of Moses, David, or Elijah,—or of St. Paul, St. Peter, and other New Testament characters.

This biographical plan avoids the objection against expository preaching that it becomes monotonous and disjointed when chapters are discussed verse by verse. It has furthermore the great advantage of being based on a story, the very telling of which secures attention and interest from the beginning, and, if wisely arranged and developed, will hold them to the close.

A very large part of the Bible is biography, and this biographical form of sermons or lectures is the best way to bring out the meaning and lessons of such parts, and to make them bear on the minds and hearts of the congregation, and in a way not soon forgotten. Many leading preachers employ this method, especially at the second or evening service; and their published lectures, which abound in our homiletical literature, will be found of service and material aid by young preachers who are timid in venturing in unfamiliar waters. Among the best general helps in this line, we mention Farrar, and also Conybeare and Howson, on St. Paul; Bishop Hall's contemplations on the Old and New Testaments; Dean Stanley's History of the Jewish Church; and Henry's Exposition of the Bible, which, whilst of little value critically or exegetically, is most helpful in homiletical arrangement and practical suggestion.

4. **Its Requisites.** For successful preaching under this method, several things are necessary:

(a) The preacher must possess and cultivate **descriptive power**,—*i. e.*, the gift or tact of giving the narrative in a lucid, connected, and interesting way.

(b) He must make himself **familiar with the country**, people, customs, times, and other circum-

stances of the subject before him. Standard Cyclopedias, good Bible Dictionaries, and books of travel in Bible lands should be carefully consulted.

(c) The discourse should not be a rambling talk, but be **fitly framed together**. It may be divided into two parts: I. The Narrative; and II. The lessons it suggests. But a better way is to draw the lessons and make the application as the points arise in the narrative, and thus keep up the narrative feature to the close.

In either way the discourse should have a distinct purpose, and present some one phase as the most prominent. This secures unity of discourse, aids the preacher in recalling the various points, and adds interest to both description and discussion.

For example, let us take the life of Jacob and come to Gen. xxviii. Our topic would be "Jacob's Journey," and the chapter would be covered by the following main divisions:

I. His father's suggestion. II. His brother's anger. III. His own experience.

Or I. Isaac. His counsel, and blessing, *vs.* 1-5.

II. Esau. His marriage and motive, *vs.* 6-9.

III. Jacob. His journey, vision, and vow, *vs.*

11-22.

A series on the first chapters in Genesis could be arranged under the following heads:

Chap. I. The Creation. Its Author; God. II. Its manner; by His word. III. Its process: 1. Light. 2. Order. 3. Life. (a) Vegetation. (b) Fish and fowls. (c) Animals. (d) Man.

Chap. II. The Creation of Man. I. His special creation, *vs.* 7. II. His residence, *vs.* 8-14. III. His occupation, *v.* 15. IV. His companions. 1. Animals, *vs.* 19, 20. 2. Eve. (a) Her creation, *vs.* 21-2. (b) Their marriage. V. His religion. 1. The Sabbath appointed, *vs.* 2, 3. 2. Obedience required, *v.* 17.

Chap. III. The Fall. I. The temptation, *vs.* 1-5. II. The sin, *v.* 6. III. The consequence. 1. The investigation, *vs.* 8-13. 2. The sentence, *vs.* 16-19. 3. The expulsion, *vs.* 22-24.

If preaching on the life of St. Paul, we come to Acts xvi., we could make the topic "St. Paul on the confines of two Continents," and consider:

I. What happened on leaving Asia? 1. The call of Timothy, *vs.* 1-3. 2. Delivering the Synodical decrees, *vs.* 4, 5. 3. The Macedonian vision, *vs.* 8-10.

II. What occurred on entering Europe? 1. The first convert, *vs.* 12-15. 2. The imprisonment and deliverance, *vs.* 16-28. 3. The conversion of the jailer, *vs.* 29-34.

Or we could style it "The three conversions:"

I. That of Timothy, *vs.* 1-3. II. That of Lydia, *vs.* 12-15. III. That of the jailer, *vs.* 23-34.

5. **Its occasions.** The Expository method may be used:

(*a*) In preaching on the Pericopes or any extended passage, as the text of the sermon.

(*b*) It especially commends itself for the second or evening service. It is a relief and advantage to the preacher to have something different from the morning discourse, and will often secure full attendance and special interest on the part of the congregation.

(*c*) It is the best method for week-evening services, where the pastor should be a teacher rather than a preacher. Whether he takes the Sunday-school lesson or some other selection, this method of Expository lecture will be found the best for such services.

GENERAL REMARKS ON METHODS OF DIVISION.

1. While every preacher will naturally give preference to one of these methods, it is well to cultivate and use them all at different times. Each method has its peculiar advantages, and variety in the treatment of texts and topics will also be gained.

2. Sometimes a text will admit of the combination of two or more of these methods in the same dis-

course. Some homileticians have made this a separate method of division and called it the **topico-textual** method, because it presents topical points of thought under a textual arrangement.

Thus a sermon on Faith, if based on John xi : 40, would present these points :

I. Its Nature. "If thou wouldst believe."

II. Its Basis. "Said I not unto thee" (the word and promises of Christ).

III. Its Reward. "Thou shouldst see the glory of God." Here we have the arrangement and advantages of the topical and textual methods combined.

A sermon on Sin, if based on James i : 15, would allow the same combination :

I. Its Source. "When lust hath conceived."

II. Its Course. "It bringeth forth sin."

III. Its End. "Bringeth forth death."

This combination is also seen in a division suggested under the Propositional method, viz. :

I. The text explained. (Analytical or textual treatment.)

II. The text applied. (In Synthetical propositions or inferences.)

Such combination is of special value because possessing the advantages of both methods. In

preaching a topical sermon, therefore, it is not sufficient to have an appropriate text, but the most suitable text that can be found, and if possible a text which contains all the points of the topic which are to be prominent in the sermon.

3. Sometimes it may be well to **depart from the stiff and formal phraseology** of the usual divisions, and compare the text to a garden of flowers, a basket of fruit, or a house of many mansions, etc., each of which is first examined separately, and then grouped together for contemplation. This would be really the same as already given, but the manner of putting it may add interest to the sermon, provided the law of fitness and propriety be not violated, and it be not employed too often.

Examples: Gal. v : 22, 23. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace," etc.

Here a refreshing departure would be to call this text a basket of precious fruit, and the preacher would

I. Exhibit each kind separately. [Explain each term.]

II. Place them together for contemplation. [Here he would observe they were the fruit of the Spirit, not of the world; they were alike, yet of great variety; of a kind that will not rot or decay, and "against which there is no law."]

III. Distribute them to the congregation.

1. For their own delight.
2. For the relief of others.
3. For occasion of thanksgiving to God.

Rom. xi: 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God," etc.

Here is a river of God which, like the river in Eden, parts into four heads.

I. Let us walk along the banks of each stream, and gaze into "the depths" of

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. His knowledge. | 2. His wisdom. |
| 3. His judgments. | 4. His ways. |

II. Step aside and contemplate them together.

We will thus be impressed with these lessons:

1. God's attributes, doctrines, and dealings are beyond our comprehension.

2. They are full of "riches," though not understood.

3. Their contemplation is of great value:

- (a) In assuring our faith.
- (b) In silencing our cavils.
- (c) In consoling our griefs.

4. While we prepare our sermons according to some recognized method, we should ever remain master and not become the slave of that method. The preacher's personality must not be sacri-

ficed to accommodate the machinery of homiletics, but should be manifest in the use he makes of that machinery. Each one must choose that method which suits him best, and which he can really make his own,—that which is best adapted to the working of his mind, as well as to the people he addresses, and the purpose he has in view. And this fact should make him study, not the less but the more, these methods of preparing sermons, until he has mastered them all.

Method in preparation imposes no fetters on the mind, but facilitates free action and develops its resources. If homiletical rules and methods ever become hurtful instead of helpful, such rules are either false or else they are not properly understood and used. At the same time, it should not be forgotten, if these rules at times seem to put restraint on the preacher, it is to secure the rights of the hearer.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INTRODUCTION AND THE CONCLUSION.—

THE INTRODUCTION.

WE have already stated that sermons are usually divided into three parts: the Introduction, the Discussion or body of the sermon, and the Conclusion or application. What has been said heretofore relates chiefly to the subject-matter in the Discussion, and the other two parts remain to be considered. Of these we take up now the Introduction.

1. **Its meaning and purpose.** The first part of the sermon is called the Introduction. The Latin word *Exordium* is sometimes used. Its purpose is the same as the preface to a book, and is intended to introduce the text or topic of the sermon to the favorable attention of the congregation.

2. **Its importance.** Much depends on how a man begins anything he undertakes. The proverb that a "bad beginning makes a good ending," is seldom verified in actual experience. Ground lost in the beginning is seldom recovered, and a battle begun in a blunder generally ends in defeat. First

impressions are lasting, and it is of great importance in preaching, both for the truth's sake and for the preacher's sake, that these be favorable. Not only should we be careful in the start to avoid arousing any feeling of aversion or hostility against ourselves or our theme, but we should study how best to introduce our subject so as to gain the attention, interest, and sympathy of the audience. If these are gained at the beginning, they may readily be held to the close.

3. **The material.** Whatever helps to *introduce* the text or topic of discourse is proper material for the Introduction. Whatever helps the hearers to understand the surroundings, circumstances, or bearings of the text; or the reason why that particular topic was chosen for the occasion, is not only appropriate, but useful and often essential in beginning a sermon.

We give the following points and suggestions concerning the material of the Introduction:

(a) An Introduction should **never be an apology**. If the apology that you are poorly prepared be true, it is a shame; if false, it is a sin. If you are poorly prepared, the congregation will find it out without being told; and if they do not, why should you debase yourself before them? They have a right to expect an educated and earnest pastor

will always be able to preach to edification, even if he has been hindered in his preparation. To begin with an apology in the expectation of making a deeper impression, is to be untruthful and deceitful.

(*b*) The Introduction should **not be a part of the discussion** which belongs to the body of the discourse, except it be intended simply to arouse interest in the subject.

(*c*) It may be **explanatory** of the words of the text when necessary. Criticism of the translation and quotations of the original should seldom be made, and never unless some important truth is thereby brought out. It looks like a pretentious parade of learning which the true scholar always avoids. But where an unusual, difficult, or obsolete word or phrase occurs in the text, it is of advantage to have its meaning made plain before the general discussion begins.

(*d*) When the text is part of a narrative no better introduction can be made than **to tell the story** of which it is a part, describing especially its time, locality, persons, and circumstances. This forms an easy and interesting introduction, and secures attention from the start. Care must be taken not to prolong the narrative, but sketch only its leading and important features.

(*e*) An account of the Author or a **description**

of the **Book** from which the text is taken, especially of writers and books not often referred to, will form interesting and instructive material for the Introduction.

(*f*) Good introductions may sometimes be made by **giving the reasons** which influence us in selecting the text. It gains attention to know the preacher has a special message, a special object or purpose in his sermon, just as it does to tell a man at once *why* you call to see him.

Such reason may be because the text is taken from the Gospel or Epistle for that day, or was suggested by the particular season of the church year. Or it may be because something has occurred in the congregation or community which makes the text or topic specially appropriate at that time, or has aroused public interest in some doctrine or duty; or the prevailing indifference to such doctrine or duty requires its presentation. In any such or similar event it is sometimes well to state in the Introduction the facts which thus decided the choice of the subject.

4. **General rules concerning Introductions.**

(*a*) **Not every sermon** needs an Introduction. Sometimes it is well to enter at once on the discussion without preliminary remarks.

(*b*) Introductions should **be brief**. People want the preacher to get to the main part of the sermon as soon as possible, and it is a great fault to weary them in the beginning. If the material is very abundant it is better to put some of it in the body of the sermon than to make the Introduction too long. It is the first course of the feast, and should whet the appetite but not satisfy it.

(*c*) They should be **simple, easy, and natural**. They should not demand too much thought nor excite too much wonder. Begin with modesty of language and demeanor, if you wish to win your way to the hearts of your hearers. Do not start off with a sky-rocket nor begin on a high pitch either in matter or manner. Introductions of sermons, like that of friends, should be made in plain language and natural manner.

(*d*) The Introduction should be **well studied** and thought out, and expressed in short and suggestive sentences. This needs special attention when the sermon is not written. Rambling, confused, and ungrammatical sentences at the beginning will not only make an unfavorable impression on the congregation, but will be a discouragement and hindrance to the preacher himself. Some happy mode of expression and literary elegance will have the opposite effect and give flavor and favor to the entire sermon.

(c) It is a good rule to leave the preparation of the Introduction until the body of **the sermon is completed**, as it is best to build the porch after the house is finished. This avoids putting in the Introduction what is already in the discussion, and the mind can best judge, after the other parts are completed, what sort of introduction the sermon ought to have,—for as Pascal says, “the last thing the writer of a book finds out, is how to begin.”

THE CONCLUSION.

1. **Its meaning.** The word Conclusion has two meanings—to come to an end, and to bring the mind to a decision. The Conclusion of a sermon therefore refers not only to its closing sentences, but especially to its application to the congregation, so as to produce in them the intended results. It is the place in the sermon where the rays are brought to a focus and made to burn. It is a distinct part of the discourse, the peroration of the ancients, and the *Schlussrede* of the Germans.

2. **Its importance.** All that was said about the importance of the Introduction will apply with greater force to the Conclusion. While the saying “All’s well that ends well” may be an overstatement, it expresses a truth our observation and experience will justify. Luther places among the

qualities of a good preacher that he ought to know when to stop.

Too many preachers neglect the preparation of this part of their sermons, trusting to the enthusiasm the delivery of the body of the sermon will excite in their minds, to carry them safely to the end. The result is they are weakest where they ought to be strongest. It is pitiful to see the distress depicted on the countenance of a preacher when he is searching for a good closing thought or sentence, and cannot find it.

In the great orations which have come down to us from antiquity, the most impressive thought and language was reserved for the close, and the same plan is pursued to-day by the best speakers in legislative halls and in courts of law. If statesmen and lawyers find this the best way to make their speeches bring their hearers to a favorable decision and move men to action, surely preachers of the gospel should be equally wise.

That the conclusion is a very important part of the sermon is evident not only because it makes the last impression on the congregation, but because it is the summing up and gathering together of all parts of the sermon for practical effect. The aim and purpose of the preacher must be effected here. There is no use in gathering hammer and nails if

they are never driven in where needed. To fail here, may be to fail altogether.

3. Conclusions may have different forms.

(a) That of inferences or lessons. Where the sermon is doctrinal, historical, or philosophical it is customary to conclude with several inferences drawn from the subject or its discussion, or the practical lessons the subject suggests. Where this is done they should be few in number and striking in form, so as to make and leave a vivid impression upon the minds and hearts of the hearers. Sometimes it is well to precede them with a brief recapitulation of the points or heads of the sermon, but the conclusion should consist in proper lessons or real inferences, and not be merely the heads of the discourse repeated.

Examples: If Ps. xlv : 1, be used for a Reformation sermon, showing what God accomplished through Luther and his associates, the following inferences would form a good conclusion:

1. Let us appreciate their work. 2. Let us be true to their work. 3. Let us carry on their work.

John x : 9. "I am the door," etc.

Concluding lessons—1. That door is now open.
2. Some day it will be shut.

Luke xiv : 21. "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor," etc.

Inferences—1. There are many in the church who ought to “go out.” 2. There are more outside who ought to come in.

John viii : 36. “If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Lessons—1. Gain this liberty. 2. Keep this liberty. 3. Use your liberty.

(*b*) That of **application**. By application is meant the showing in the conclusion of the sermon, how and to whom the various truths or facts discussed and presented are to be applied for practical effect. Such application should never be personal, *i.e.*, directed to any particular individual, but should be addressed to the several classes of persons present, or to the particular time, condition, and needs of the congregation or community.

The application need not always be kept for the conclusion, but can sometimes be made with great effect in the discussion as the points arise. Generally, however, it is the best to reserve it until the discussion or general presentation has been completed. While never personal, the application should always be particular and practical.

Examples: Rom. v : 1. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,” etc.

Let us apply this:

1. To those who have found peace.
2. To those who are seeking peace.
3. To those who remain at enmity with Him.

Luke xiv : 28. "Which of you intending to build a tower," etc.

Good inferences here would be:

1. Count the cost before you begin.
2. Pay the cost and begin at once.

But an application would be:

1. To those who began but abandoned the work.
2. To those just beginning.
3. To those who never commenced.

Rev. xxii : 13. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," etc. Apply this:

1. To those to whom Jesus is Alpha but not Omega.
2. To those to whom He is not even Alpha.

(c) That of **exhortation, entreaty, or appeal.**

The conclusion of a sermon is the proper place for an appeal to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. If the design of preaching is not only to proclaim the Gospel, but to persuade men to accept it and to comply with its terms, there should be an appeal in every sermon. To "beseech men by

the mercies of God," is the highest motive, and also a most effectual mode in winning souls to Christ.

But it needs to be wisely done or it may become the weakest part of the discourse. A desultory exhortation, without plan, point, or precision, will spoil the sermon and leave an unfavorable impression. It may surrender the fort after it has been taken. It will be like building a house with strong walls and then covering them with loose boards instead of a compact and symmetrical roof. It has been well said, "Some sermons end like the Euphrates, over the many terminals of which men can pass dry shod."

Nor should this form of conclusion ever degenerate into mere coaxing or threatening, but be manly, persuasive, and sincere. It should be the point where the preacher appears at his best as the ambassador of Christ and the messenger of God.

This form of entreaty or appeal is only another way of putting or expressing the lessons, inferences, or points of application. Instead of inferring, *e. g.*, that men ought to hear the gospel, heed the gospel, and help the gospel,—the preacher will appeal to them to do it. He will appeal to men's heads, their hearts, and their hands. He will appeal by the mercies of God and by the destiny of men; by the song of the saved and the wail of the lost.

The design of the Introduction of a sermon is to arrest attention and excite interest in the subject; that of the Discussion is to inform and instruct the mind; but that of the Conclusion is to affect the heart, which can best be done by entreaty and appeal.

4. General Rules for Conclusions.

(a) Conclusions should **not be "stereotyped."** Some preachers always close in the same way, and often with the same set phrases. This should be avoided. Variety can be gained by employing the different modes at different times. The nature of the theme will decide which mode is best. If every sermon is closed with a thrilling appeal, the appeal will soon fail to thrill.

(b) They should **be short.** When you reach the conclusion, the congregation will expect you to conclude. Appeals to the feelings especially should be in few words, as its power is lost when the appeal is prolonged. Avoid the phrases "lastly," "finally," "in conclusion," "one more remark," etc., especially their repetition. If the conclusion has various parts, it is best not to enumerate them, except when they are in the form of inferences or lessons. There is no advantage in putting up sign-boards to let the congregation know how near you are to the terminal.

Very frequently the last division of the sermon is

the *practical* view of the subject, *i. e.*, the practical application of the topic discussed. In such cases especially there is no need for further lessons or applications; all that is necessary in the conclusion is to bring the sermon to a graceful and impressive close. We give an example of this from Reinhard, whose conclusions were generally the weakest parts of his sermons. Occasionally, however, his manner of closing was very happy. In the instance referred to, after he had finished his third division, which was of a practical sort, he concluded a sermon with these words: "Oh! that to this end God would make us feel, my dear brethren, the power of the Gospel of Jesus; that by this gospel He would purify, strengthen, and elevate your mind, and give you that seriousness, that wisdom, and that dignity which ought to distinguish the disciples of His Son. To Him, with His Son and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen." Such brief *votum* or prayer would fittingly form the best conclusion for many sermons.

(c) Their style should be **tranquil and tender**.

While uttered with deep emotion and often soaring to sublimity of thought and expression, the Conclusion should not be violent in gesture nor boisterous in tone. The stream of eloquence should not end in the roar of a cataract. An abrupt termination rarely leaves a good impression. The hearers

should be brought into that frame of mind which fits them to receive "the peace of God" with which the sermon closes.

(*d*) Much depends on the way in which the **Conclusion concludes**. The last thought and sentence should be well chosen and expressed. Some striking and appropriate incident from history or of recent occurrence, is very forcible. Some apt quotation either of prose or poetry leaves a pleasing impression. If the poetry be a familiar hymn, not the whole of it, but a passage only should be used.

Best of all, is it to close with the text itself, or some other appropriate passage of Scripture, like one of the following :

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

"Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

"Now the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever. Amen.”

Thus the sermon begins and closes with God's Word, and the line of the discourse forms a circle, and is complete. The last thought should be hopeful, bearing the hearers toward if not into heaven.

The last word should be a noun or other important word. The teacher who told his pupils that “a preposition was a poor word to close a sentence with,” gave a good illustration of his rule; and another, who when travelling inquired of a stranger, “can you tell me where there is a good place to stop at?” must have been taken aback with the reply “Just before the ‘at’.”

Besides being an important word, the last word should in its sound be one on which the voice of the preacher and the ear of the hearer can rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE SERMON.

THE third part of Homiletics is called Composition, by which is meant the putting together in proper literary form the materials already gathered and arranged in order. It is the completion of the sermon, making it ready for delivery. It is the building of the house, after the architect has drawn the plans, and all the materials have been brought to the spot. It is of great importance in the preparation of a sermon, not only because requiring the most time, but it is that which gives the sermon its final form. All that precedes in the way of Invention or Division is but preparatory to this. The preacher's homiletical skill will appear not only in the way he divides his text or forms the skeleton, but rather in the way he clothes that skeleton with flesh and blood, *i. e.*, in the way he elaborates his plan and expresses his thoughts. It is the final building of the house after it has been fitly framed together, and to fail here would bring to naught all previous preparations and labor. To have a good literary style and compose well is a high art and

rare attainment, and can be attained only by careful practice and by observing the best rules.

ITS PARTS.

Composition may be divided into two parts, the mental and the literary part.

(a) **The mental part.** By this we mean the thinking out of a sermon. Whether written or unwritten, every sermon should be carefully thought out, not only in its plan and arrangement, but in its various arguments, proofs, illustrations, and applications. The preacher's brain as well as his heart will be made visible in his sermons. Successful preaching does not depend on raising or stating points, but in their elaboration. Such careful thinking out of the sermon is necessary to make sure our arguments will prove what we wish, and our illustrations fit in all their parts.

In unwritten sermons the mode and manner of expressing certain parts of the sermon should be thought over and determined beforehand, so that when the preacher rises in the pulpit he understands clearly what he is about to say, and how to say it.

Much of this mental composition is done in the formation of the plan or skeleton of the sermon, and too many stop when that is completed. But a carefully prepared plan is not a sermon, but only an

outline of the order of thoughts, and unless these thoughts be mentally developed and elaborated, the sermon will be incomplete, inconsistent, and weak.

(b) The literary part.

1. Every young preacher should write out one sermon every week. It is better to write one with deliberation and care, than to write two hurriedly and without proper thought and study. Many written sermons are purely extemporaneous, and are without excuse for being written. The only reason for writing sermons is that we may express ourselves with more accuracy, propriety, and elegance than otherwise. If these be neglected, it is foolish to lose time and labor in writing. This practice of writing should be kept up for some years, until the preacher has acquired a terse, vigorous, and also graceful style of speech, and until he is able to choose his words and form his sentences without confusion or embarrassment when facing a congregation.

2. In writing, cultivate a bold hand, and use paper with lines far enough apart to allow easy reading, and interlineations when necessary. Paper is cheaper than eyesight.

3. Sketch out the plan and arrange the skeleton of the sermon before beginning to write, so as to give each part its proper proportion of time, and

avoid making the sermon too long, and keep that sketch before you while writing.

4. Write, if possible, when the fire burns (Ps. xxxix : 3) and the glow is on the heart, and at times least liable to interruption. Write under the impression the congregation is before you, so as to catch something of the enthusiasm of free speech, and put it in your written sermon. At the same time keep the purpose or leading idea of the sermon constantly in mind, so as to preserve unity of discourse in the composition. For the same reason, after an interruption, go back and read a page or more of your manuscript before resuming writing.

5. In writing, aim at correctness of expression and elegance of style. If these are neglected, the sermon had better remain unwritten.

Correctness is gained by using proper words arranged in proper sentences, and elegance of style by observing the rules of literary elegance and by proper ornamentation. We devote considerable space to rules and suggestions on this important part of composition.

ITS STYLE, OR LANGUAGE.

The word *Style*, being derived from the Latin *stylus*, the pointed pen of metal or bone with which the Romans wrote on their tablets, signifies the

manner of writing or expressing thought by means of language. The term has passed into general usage and is now applied to a man's dress as well as his address—to his walk as well as to his conversation; but always relates not to what he does, but to the way in which he does it. If our language is the raiment with which we clothe our thoughts, our style is the manner in which we arrange these garments so as to produce the most pleasing and beneficial results.

At the same time we should remember style is not so much the adding something to the thought from the outside, as it is the art of bringing out the beauty of the truth itself; and it has been well said "the worst condemnation of a careless and unattractive style is that it does the truth injustice."

The importance of a good style in the composition of sermons can hardly be over-estimated. What is worth saying at all is worth saying well, whether expressed by the pen or the tongue. As ministers of Christ are to deliver the most important truths men can know, it certainly is of great importance they should choose the best words, and arranged in the best form, to do it. It would seem as if some preacher's words were "non-conductors," *i.e.*, they prevent the truth from being understood and taking effect. Many a truth is lost

for want of the right word to express it; others are crushed beneath a pile of useless adjectives; while others are shut up in hopeless imprisonment through violation of every law of common grammar. A peculiar definition of language may here be applied in a way the writer did not intend, when he defined it as "the art of concealing one's thoughts."

As ministers profess to be educated men, the style of their composition will be a good proof of that profession.

It is an easy thing with some to write and speak with grace and elegance. It is a talent or gift with which they were born, or the result of careful training at home and school. Others have had no early advantages, and to these it is no small task to break careless habits and to acquire such as are elegant and correct. To such we offer these suggestions:

1. Elegance and correctness of style can be cultivated by continuous reading and study of the best authors. This should not be confined to sermons or religious books, but extend to all departments of literature. But it should be literature whose style is worth acquiring.

2. Writing for the public press will beget the proper care, offer a strong motive, and afford the

necessary practice in acquiring a good style of composition. You will be more careful how you write for the public eye than you will be in private correspondence.

3. Mingle with educated and cultured people. The topics of conversation, their manner of conversation, and your own care to express yourself well in their presence, will be of excellent service. It is a great gain to a clergyman, not only in improving his speech, but in many ways, to mingle freely with the best educated people in the place where he resides. This can readily be done without neglecting any pastoral duties to the humbler classes.

4. Cultivate and maintain a religious frame of mind. Its elevating and ennobling tendency and effect will be manifest in the composition as well as the delivery of sermons. The best and greatest sermons are spiritual rather than intellectual, and this can come only from a devout mind.

Style in language may be divided into three parts; the choice of words, their arrangement into sentences, and their ornamentation.

1. **The choice of words.** A man's style depends largely on the sort of words he uses. They should be clean, clear, and clever. A clear and forcible style cannot be produced with ambiguous words, nor a

polished style with words which are vulgar and coarse.

In the choice of proper words in the composition of sermons you may be aided by observing the following features or tests.

(a) **Propriety.** By this is meant such words only should be used as are proper and suitable for the pulpit. Solomon says "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver," and also states "the preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies."

H. W. Beecher is reported as saying he "would pick a word out of the gutter if he could knock a sinner down with it." But knocking sinners down is not the best method of conversion, and words whereby they are overcome are the mighty words of Scripture, and not such as are picked from gutters. Pulpit language should not be stiff and stilted, but it should always be dignified. It may be common and homely, but never coarse or low. Our speech, says Paul, should "be always seasoned with salt," meaning thereby, not that it should be spicy, but wholesome. One reason why sermons against popular sins often fail in effect, is owing to the fact that such sins are described in coarse or slang phrases

which have a humorous intent, instead of words of sober and solemn rebuke.

To *quote* slang, coarse, or profane language in order to rebuke it, is decidedly wrong and should never be done. The people know what you mean without you quoting it, and your refusal to mention such words gives additional power to your rebuke.

The law of propriety can never be violated with impunity, whether it be in our conduct or our speech.

(b) **Accuracy and Precision.** To be precise, exact, and accurate in the use of words is an attainment as valuable as it is rare. It is a great thing in composition to use the right word in the right place. Accuracy avoids the use of wrong words. Many words are very similar in sound which are very different in sense. Some use the word *observation* when they mean *observance*; *consciousness* when they mean *conscience*; *respectfully* when they mean *respectively*; *forward* when they mean *froward*; *ingenious* when they mean *ingenuous*, etc. Words of nearly the same meaning are carelessly employed, and they speak of religion when they mean holiness; hope when they mean assurance; conversion when they mean regeneration, etc. Carelessness in this respect gives the impression the speaker uses words he does not understand.

Precision avoids redundancy of words. Its derivation from *præcido*, means to cut off, to pare down. Some preachers employ a multitude of words, thinking thereby to make themselves better understood, whereas they are doing the very opposite. They should remember the Lord's rebuke of Job, "who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" Every unnecessary word in a sentence introduces some new idea or feeling whereby the mind of the hearer is diverted or confused. Polish is gained not by adding anything, but by *removing* whatever obscures.

To be accurate therefore is to select and employ such words as will best express our meaning, and to be precise is to avoid multiplying words, and the use of such as are ambiguous in their meaning.

This rule applies with special force to themes and heads of discourse in preaching, and also to quotations of Scripture passages, where accuracy and precision are indispensable, but should be constantly observed in all parts of the sermon.

(c) **Purity.** Two things are included in this rule :—the first of which is that our words be good English. The careful use of English words and idioms should be the aim of all who preach in the English language. Some young preachers have been reared and educated in communities whose

language is a mixture of two or more dialects. Such will need to exercise special care to avoid some terms or expressions to which they have been accustomed, and to use only such as are pure English.

The English language is the most composite of any spoken language, and calls to its aid all others to form its words. Hence even those who have been reared in English-speaking communities, need to observe this rule of purity, so as to avoid as far as possible giving preference to words of foreign extraction. Many of our most familiar words are from the Latin, but have become so thoroughly *anglicized* as to be considered good English. This is especially the case with our theological phrasology, and it is nigh impossible to preach a sermon in which such words as inspiration, sanctification, regeneration etc., do not frequently occur. Their use is therefore not only admissible but often unavoidable.

Nevertheless it remains a fact, such words do not have the strength of words purely Anglo-Saxon. To beg is a stronger word than to supplicate; to quit, than to relinquish; to mix, than to commingle; to search, than to investigate; and to die, than to expire. The strength and charm of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" lies largely in his use of the

short words of pure English; and his style is well worthy of study and imitation.

Purity of style also excludes all words which are offensive to good taste. The preacher is a public teacher, and he has no right to use words which are not recognized by good authorities, but are coined to suit the occasion. Nor has he a right to employ language which suggests impure thoughts or imagery, or whatever may defile. Also that sort of religious phraseology known as *cant* and *rant*, and which used to be regarded in some places as a mark of inspiration, must be avoided if purity of style is desired.

2. The arrangement of words into sentences.

The proper combination or arrangement of words into sentences is as important to a good style as is their selection, and much that has already been said under the choice of words, will apply with equal force here.

The following rules should be observed:

a. The arrangement must be **grammatically correct**. We call attention to several violations of the rules of grammar, sometimes heard in pulpits:

(*a*) The use of plural verbs, pronouns, etc., with collective nouns in the singular.

E. g., "The congregation *are* invited," etc., or "will hold *their* annual meeting." If the plural form of

the verb or pronoun is preferred, it should be "the members of the congregation are," etc.

So, too, the common use of the word *none* as plural must be avoided. It is a compound of *no one*, and is singular. "There is none that doeth good," etc., "None was cleansed," etc.

(b) The use of the personal pronoun in the objective form after the verb "is."

E.g., "It is me," or "him," instead of "it is I," or "he."

(c) The use of the verb "was," with the subjunctive, expressing condition.

E.g., "If I was," or "if you was," instead of "If I were," or "you were." See in Heb. v : 8, "Though He *were* a Son," etc.

(d) Using the past tense in what is continuous.

E.g., "I told them who I *was*,"—instead of "who I am."

Or using the present tense for what is future.

E.g. "As next Sunday *is* Easter," instead of "will be Easter."

b. Every sentence should have **perspicuity**.

The clearness of its meaning will depend largely on the arrangement of its words. The aim of every public speaker should be to be understood, and so to construct his sentences that his hearers not only may, but must understand him. To gain this end

(a) Avoid mixed sentences. Do not include too many qualifying words, phrases, and parentheses. If these are necessary, it is much better to put them into separate sentences.

Take the following definition of faith, as an example of a mixed sentence: "Faith, the first and chiefest act of the soul in religious experience, and which must not be confounded with simple belief nor with mere hope (even if it be styled 'the anchor of the soul'), though containing both these elements in its component parts, is a subjective reaching forth and laying hold on the objective facts and truths contained in the gospel."

Such a sentence is most confusing and should be divided into at least three to make its meaning clear.

(b) Where qualifying words must be used, place them as near as you can to the word they qualify. Much ambiguity is caused by the neglect of this rule.

If a speaker would say, "Balak sent messengers to Balaam to come and curse Israel encamped on the plain in fear and trembling,"—the hearer would conclude the children of Israel were in fear and trembling, instead of Balak whom the speaker intended.

The common expression, "I expect to preach

myself on that occasion," is ambiguous, as it would leave the impression the speaker expected to preach about himself, instead of that he himself expected to preach.

(c) Perspicuity is gained by short sentences, and hence long sentences should be avoided. The example given under (a) applies also here. Short sentences arrest attention, and please the mind because readily grasped. Short sentences, however, are not always clear, as they may be too much compressed to be easily understood by the uneducated mind. An entire paragraph of epigrams would be an illustration of this. What is spoken to the ear must necessarily be more full and explanatory, than what is written for the eye. But where more ample statements are necessary, they should follow in other sentences, rather than be crowded into the sentence they are to explain.

(d) Attempts at perspicuity may be carried too far. Explaining what has been already clearly stated, is not only unnecessary but tiresome, and is a serious blemish to a speaker's style. Too many lenses may magnify an object until it is more obscure than to the unaided eye.

c. A sentence should have **unity**. Each sentence should express but one thought, state but one proposition, and leave but one impression.

This secures unity even when its language has every proper variety.

This law of style is violated

(a) When the subject is changed before the sentence is finished. *E.g.* "Our sins were atoned for when Christ died on the cross, that instrument of torture used by the Romans when putting criminals to death." Here the mind is diverted from the atoning purpose of Christ's death, to the particular manner of death He suffered.

(b) When things unconnected are put in the same sentence. *E.g.* "Our faith lays hold of the Lord Jesus, and we must share our possessions with those who are in need."

(c) When too many explanatory words are introduced. The definition of faith given under (a) of the preceding rule will illustrate this.

d. Sentences should be **vigorous** in style. The ancients called this energy. Words can be so combined in sentences as to impart a special force in their utterance. Even a commonplace thought or familiar truth gains new interest and force, when expressed in clever and vigorous language. Much will depend on our use of vigorous words, but much also on the way we put them together. A vigorous style comes chiefly from a careful and continued study of the science of language, and familiarity with

the best writers; but we may call special attention to the following points:

(a) Unnecessary words weaken a sentence, and should be excluded. Style is a state of intensity: the greatest number of things in the smallest number of words.

(b) Avoid circumlocution. Come to the point and say what you mean. A directness of aim and purpose gives energy to speech.

(c) Observe the rules of emphasis even in composition, and put the strong word in the right place. Be careful with the last word of every important sentence, and close with a word on which the thought can rest, and the sentence is made complete.

(d) Energy of style comes also from deep emotion. No man can be a strong speaker without strong feeling. Goethe's words, "*Gefuehl ist alles*," may be an over-statement, but are founded in truth. And it is the love of Christ, deep and strong within us, which not only constrains us to preach, but makes our preaching vigorous and effective, and gives the sermon both flavor and power.

e. Let the style of composition be **hopeful and bright**, not pessimistic nor condemnatory. Like the Master, come to save men's lives, not to destroy them. Some ministers never present even the most

helpful and comforting truths of the Gospel, except in a fault-finding way. Dr. Watson has well said, "When a preacher grows sour and vindictive, the sermon has lost its grace and tenderness; and I know not which is the greater calamity: a preacher without magnanimity, or a sermon without nobility."

CHAPTER IX.

ORNAMENTATION OF LANGUAGE.

ORNAMENTATION is a law of nature, which adorns her works with foliage and flowers to make herself beautiful and fragrant. Among the races of mankind it is also a mark of advancement, refinement, and culture. The barbarian is content with his rude hut of mud, but the more races advance in civilization and education, the more they seek to make their houses beautiful with proper ornamentation. And this is true of their speech as well as of their dwellings. Nothing admits of ornamentation better than language, and it should be the aim and study of every public speaker to enrich his utterances from the boundless stores which are at his command.

It is here the work of the preacher will be that of the artist, resembling that of the painter or of the sculptor. Sometimes it is that of the painter, for there is such a thing as word-painting in public speech, and when well done is a great ornament to a sermon. At other times it is that of the sculptor, whose art appears in his ability to cut off and

remove with chisel and mallet, whatever does not belong to the statue he is forming out of the block of stone. In the one case he puts something on, and in the other he takes something away; but both alike are done to give ornament and beauty to the work.

If it be thought derogatory to the Gospel that its preachers should employ any ornament of speech in its proclamation, we need but remind you there is no book more full of sublime imagery or splendor of diction, than the Bible itself. Even our Lord, who spake as never man spake, employed similes and allegories in teaching His sublime truths, as is seen in His many parables and discourses. He closed his sermon on the Mount with the whistling of winds and the rushing of floods, and laid a tribute on all the phenomena of nature to give force and beauty to the doctrines He taught.

Young preachers, however, need to be cautioned against, rather than urged to the embellishment of their sermons with ornament, as the tendency, especially in this country, is to extravagance in this matter. The purpose of preaching is not to entertain, but to instruct, admonish, and persuade. Our preaching is to be "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." A house which is all ornament

will not do to live in, and excess of rhetorical embellishment will spoil any sermon. Truth, like beauty, is most adorned when least adorned. Extravagant ornamentation characterizes the housemaid rather than the mistress of the house. Mere rhetorical bombast, sometimes heard in the pulpit, is the cheap jewelry which marks the vulgar mind.

The following rules and suggestions, therefore, are given to caution against false or extravagant ornamentation, as well as to guide in the use of that which will be helpful and proper.

Ornamentation is applied to language in four ways: in the elegance with which thought is expressed; in the figures of speech employed; in the use of illustrations; and in the exercise of the imagination.

a. Elegance of expression. This is gained in several ways.

(*a*) **Avoid harsh words.** Certain words by their very sound, and others by their associations, seem to grate upon the ear. Dreadful words, like hell or damnation, are not to be made common by frequent use. The awful realities they signify are not to be kept back in our preaching, but other words or phrases can be used with better effect. There may be times when the hearts of preacher and hearers are stirred to their depth, when these words

can be used with overwhelming effect, as our Lord used them in Matt. xxiii : 33, but such occasions are rare.

So of other words which are not dreadful, but simply harsh. These cannot always be avoided without obscuring our meaning, but where a choice can be made we should select such as contribute to an easy and graceful style ; at the same time guarding against what would become pointless, insipid, and monotonous language.

(*b*) Words in which the **sound accords** with and suggests the meaning, give elegance to language.

E.g., Thus we speak of the "pattering rain," the "twittering of swallows," the "hiss of steam," the "roar of the cataract," the "booming of cannon," etc. So in the expression "running rapidly," there is the sense of motion in the sound of its syllables. The familiar lines of Gray illustrate this rule :

"Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds."

The words of the Psalmist—"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; he leadeth me beside the still waters," have in them the fragrance of the meadow and the music of the brook.

(*c*) The use of words beginning with the same

letter, known as **alliteration**, may add elegance to a sentence. A notable instance of this is found in the 119th Psalm, in its Hebrew form. Where it is not strained, nor overdone, but appears natural and proper, it gives force as well as beauty to language. It is especially valuable in stating the chief heads of a sermon, as it not only makes a pleasing impression, but makes that impression more lasting.

Great care must be taken that the words be not far-fetched nor over-done, as in the case of the Old Puritans, who carried alliteration to ridiculous extremes in the titles and divisions of many of their sermons; *e.g.*, one addressed to "the chickens of the church, the sparrows of the Spirit, and the sweet swallows of salvation." This is ridiculous because incongruous; but to speak of "sin sowing the seeds of sorrow," gives elegance to words which teach a truth, and fit together. So a division of a sermon on Christ in which we consider His Person, His Purpose, and His Plan; or on some doctrine or truth, which we divide into its Lines, Limitations, and Lessons, gains attention and recollection by the alliteration employed. To be elegant, alliteration must be suitable, natural, and not occur too often.

(*d*) Elegance may be gained also by cultivating that terseness of expression known as the **epigram**, and by the occasional use of **antithesis**.

An epigram is a short, pithy sentence cleverly stated so as to produce a mental surprise, by some unexpected coincidence or contrast. It often takes the form of a proverb, as when the Saviour says, "whosoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

Antithesis presents truth by way of contrasts, the two clauses of the expression illustrating each other. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes abound in these forms of speech; and our Saviour employed antithesis with great power when He uttered the words "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." So also St Paul, in II. Cor. xii: 14, "The children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children."

(*c*) **Variety of expression** gives elegance to language.

This is secured either by the use of synonyms, so as to avoid the frequent use of the same word, especially in closing a sentence, or by varying the form of expression, *e.g.*, from a statement or proposition, to a question; or simply by changing the order of words.

(*f*) **Unity** gives elegance. Avoid being angular and disjointed in composition. Keep up continuity of thought throughout the discourse. Let the plan or skeleton run easily and not stiffly through the

sermon. Do not enumerate the subdivisions, nor distract the mind nor break the sermon into pieces by beginning each point with the word "again." Do not make the bones and joints of your skeleton too conspicuous. The plan or framework of the sermon is for the preacher, not the hearer. Let the flesh hide the skeleton and the vine cover the trellis. The same thing applies to proof-texts and other quotations. Chapter and verses should rarely be specified, unless there is special reason for it. If there be occasion to run on side-tracks, the switches should be passed as smoothly as possible.

(g) **Simplicity of language** gives elegance to style. It is high praise when the hearers can say, "We understood every word of the sermon." Men whose minds are not clear, use polysyllabic and ambiguous words.

b. Figures of speech.

By figures of speech we mean the comparison of things spiritual with things natural,—the employing of metaphors, similes, allegories, etc., in composition. When properly employed, imagery not only enriches language, but aids in making the speaker's meaning plain and forcible. It gives interest and beauty to abstract truths and facts, and is the chief thing which distinguishes a fresh and pleasing style from that which is uninteresting and dry.

The Scriptures abound in figurative language, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Our Lord employed every sort of figure and illustration to make plain and impressive the truths He taught. Not only are all His parables figures of speech, but in nearly every discourse He uses them freely. In speaking of His own person and work He exclaimed, "I am the good Shepherd;" "I am the light of the world,"—"I am the bread of life,"—"I am the door,"—"As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be," etc.

But as already intimated, the tendency is to excess in the use of figures of speech, and their excessive or injudicious use obscures rather than aids the mind in understanding the speaker's meaning; and instead of giving beauty and force, is a defect and blemish in style. It will be well to observe these rules:

(a) Figures of speech must be **appropriate** to the subject. They must fit naturally, and not be dragged in where they do not belong.

(b) **Avoid mixing metaphors.** The confusing of things which do not go together or belong to each other, not only defeats the use of metaphor by destroying its sense, but makes the speaker ridiculous. An eminent statesman certainly spoiled

his speech when he appealed to the undiscovered lands, "on which the hand of man had never set *foot*;"—and the speaker who stated "I now embark on that feature on which the whole subject hinges."

(c) Figures of speech should **not** be taken from what is **vulgar or low**. Their use is to elevate and not to lower the truth they illustrate. They should not raise in the mind any disagreeable or unclean thoughts or associations.

(d) They should be **used sparingly**. The excessive use of figurative language weakens and detracts as much from speech as excessive ornament does from dress. Only where the subject needs and is benefited by them should figures be used.

(e) They should be kept in **their proper sphere**. Their place is in illustration, rather than in a statement of facts.

(f) They should not be carried into **too minute detail**. It is a mistake to hunt after a great number of coincidences in unimportant points. They are apt to become merely curious, and sometimes ridiculous. Even if appropriate, too many details and resemblances reveal the preacher's ingenuity rather than illustrate his subject.

c. The use of illustrations.

The use of illustrations in sermons is so general and prominent a feature of preaching, especially in

this country, as to require special notice, although what has been said about figures of speech will largely apply to this also.

1. Their value.

The meaning of the term, to make clear and vivid, to give light and lustre to a topic, shows their value. To compare things spiritual with things natural makes them more readily understood and increases our appreciation of them. They have always been used by the masters in oratory and those who have excelled in public speech, and were constantly employed by the sacred writers and by our Lord himself.

2. Their use.

In commending the use of illustrations we would not be understood as favoring that mode of preaching which consists chiefly in story-telling. The sphere of illustration is to supplement instruction, not to supplant it. Only after a truth has been clearly defined, argued, and proven will an apt illustration be in place and be appreciated. They therefore should be used sparingly, and never unless appropriate and really illustrating the topic or point to which they are applied. An incident or story, no matter how interesting in itself, will spoil rather than help a sermon into which it does not exactly and obviously fit.

3. Their source.

(a) The many **books of religious anecdotes** or sermon-illustrations, offered for sale, are not to be commended. While some grains of wheat may be found in the abundance of chaff they contain, they have been used so often by others that they betray the fact they are of the "cut and dried" sort. Illustrations should have a freshness about them, and the whole purpose and method of their use should be largely your own.

(b) Much better is it to have **your own notebook of illustrations**. In your daily reading, whether in books of history, science, travel, fiction, or in the news of the day, many facts or incidents will occur which will serve admirably as illustrations in sermons. These should be noted either in full or by reference to where they may be found, for future use. Beware, however, of vouching for the truth of every story, or of stating it occurred under your own observation or experience.

(c) Familiarity with **Bible history and biography** will always furnish an abundant source of supply. To compare Scripture with Scripture, and illustrate Scripture truths by Scripture facts, is an element of strength in any sermon. No matter how familiar they are, they are always fresh and interesting, and come with special power because

the illustration as well as the point illustrated come from the inspired Word of God.

(*d*) Illustrations may be invented, *i.e.*, they may be supposed or imagined. While actual occurrences taken from history or the news of the day are more striking, cases which are imagined may be useful in illustrating truth. This is seen in the fables of Æsop, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and pre-eminently in the parables of our Lord. When composing or inventing illustrations, the preacher should guard against making them consist of fictitious experiences, or making himself the prominent actor, hero, or victim.

d. The exercise of the imagination.

The imagination is that power of the mind by which it forms images and contemplates them as if they were realities. It is the power of seeing the invisible, of looking beyond the boundaries of our senses, or of combining the results of our observation and knowledge in modified, new, and ideal forms. It is the picturing power of the mind, making things which are not appear as things which are. It finds its best expression in poetry, and has its place in prophecy, on which account the prophets were at first called Seers, *i.e.*, those who by revelation saw the unseen.

(*a*) Its sphere. The use of the imagination in

the composition of sermons is so constant as to require special care and cultivation. It is one of the greatest and most delightful of our mental powers. Its office is to clothe the otherwise dry fields of abstract truths or facts with life, verdure, and beauty. In art it creates what is fit and beautiful; in literature and oratory it finds the missing links, supplies what is lacking, uplifts the veil of the future, sets history before us in living characters, imparts warmth and color to all it touches, and often turns life's prose into pleasant poetry.

But imagination is apt to run riot unless carefully restrained, which is the more necessary with us because of the sacredness and responsibility of our office. We are not writers of fiction, but must speak words of truth and soberness. We must never draw on our imagination for our facts. It may be employed in filling up unessential details in description, but even here care must be taken to make them consistent and probable. It must have no place in the exegetical or doctrinal parts of sermons, but must be confined to its proper sphere in narration, illustration, or description. Jewels may be worn as ornaments, but must not be served as articles of food.

(b) The power of imagination may be **strengthened and cultivated** in several ways:

(1) By communing with **Nature**. His must be a dull mind which can gaze upon the wide expanse and ceaseless roll of the ocean ; upon majestic forms of hills and mountains ; or at night upon the countless stars shining over us, without finding and feeling his imagination stirred and aroused within him. Even the common scene of a dense forest, a pleasant landscape, or a golden sunset, will awaken in every thoughtful mind sublime and sacred imagery, and whatever poetic talent it may possess.

(2) The study of the best **works of man**, in art, architecture, and literature, will have a good effect on our powers of imagination. Familiarity with the writings of the best poets and writers of fiction will be of service, while the careful study of works of art in sculpture, painting, architecture, etc., will enlarge and elevate the sphere and strength of imagination.

(3) The habit of **devout contemplation**, especially of God, the soul, of heaven and eternity, and similar objects and truths, will kindle not only our imagination but our enthusiasm, both of which are important factors in true eloquence.

CHAPTER X.

ORIGINALITY AND IMITATION.

BEFORE leaving this department which treats of the composition of the sermon, it may be well to consider the subject of originality, and how far preachers may and should seek after it in the preparation of their sermons.

It has to do with the style and not with the substance or subject-matter of the discourse.

Certainly every sermon should be the product of the man who preaches it. To preach other men's sermons is dishonorable to the preacher, and dishonest to the congregation.

At this day it may seem impossible to be original, *i.e.*, to say anything new. Whatever may be said has already been said, and in a way upon which it may be hard to improve. Confined as ministers are to Gospel themes they must be content to put in their own way what has been presented a thousand times before. Shall we be satisfied, therefore, in being simply repeaters and imitators of others, or shall we aim at originality in our sermons?

I. Entire originality should not be attempt-

ed. We cannot create. That which is old cannot be made entirely new; "there is nothing new under the sun." Those who determine to be absolutely original, either make themselves ridiculous, or fall into grave errors. Many of the prevalent false doctrines, whereby simple souls are deceived, come from the desire in some preachers to be accounted original and say something new. "That which is true is not new, and that which is new is not true."

2. Nevertheless **every preacher should have some element of originality** in his preaching. Every sermon should be a new contribution to the truth, *i.e.*, it should be the old truth coming through a new personality. The theme and substance of the sermon cannot be new, but it comes through another man's apprehension and experience of it, and in that respect it is the preacher's own and not another man's.

What Burroughs says, in an essay on "the vital touch in literature," will apply with special force to sermons:

"It is not what the writer tells us that makes literature; it is the way he tells it; or rather, it is the degree in which he imparts to it some rare personal quality or charm that is the gift of his own spirit, something which cannot be detached from the work itself, and which is as vital as the sheen

of a bird's plumage, as the texture of a flower's petal. In other words, that which makes literature in all its forms—poetry, fiction, history, oratory—is personal and subjective, in a sense and to a degree that that which makes science, erudition, and the like is not. There is this analogy in Nature. The hive bee does not get honey from the flowers; honey is a product of the bee. What she gets from the flowers is mainly sweet water or nectar; this she puts through a process of her own, and to it adds a minute drop of her own secretion, formic acid. It is her special personal contribution that converts the nectar into honey.

“It is the quality of mind which makes the pages of Goethe, Coleridge, Lamb, literature in a sense that the works of many able minds are not. These men impart something personal and distinctive to the language they use. They make the words their own. The literary quality is not something put on or superadded. It is not of the hand, it is of the mind; it is not of the mind, but of the soul; it is of whatever is most vital and characteristic in the writer.”

3. This individuality or originality may appear in various ways:

a. In the selection of texts and statement of themes.

Striking texts may be discovered in passages of Scripture which were rarely or never used before. Simply to have an odd and curious text has led some men to ridiculous selections which defeated rather than aided the great end of preaching. To twist out of a passage a meaning it does not have or teach, cannot be too strongly condemned or scrupulously avoided. Yet those who are content to take the familiar texts which congregations have heard again and again, deprive their sermons of a freshness and interest they ought to possess. An apt and new text has made many a preacher as famous as the sermon itself, and his name remains associated with it whenever such text is read or mentioned.

So, too, the theme of the sermon should have a freshness in the way it is stated. Goethe says "originality does not consist in saying new things, but in presenting old things in a new way." We should cultivate the art of "putting things," and then put them in our own way.

b. In the interpretation, development, and disposition of the sermon.

Luther was not the author of the doctrine of repentance or of justification by faith, but he gave them a new development and position. Old jewels in new settings may seem entirely new. "Other

men labored and we are entered into their labors," not only to enjoy their results, but to penetrate yet a little deeper. Ruskin says "genius is only an unusual power of seeing," and therefore every scholarly mind possesses some power of originality.

The plan or disposition of the sermon may likewise manifest it; just as the architect's originality is seen in the plan he devises, and not in the material of which the building is constructed.

c. In its language and style of composition.

Carlyle is not so much an original thinker as writer. It is his peculiar construction of sentences and his way of stating his sentiments that has given him distinction among authors. Luther's vigorous language, and his use of words intelligible to all, added greatly to his originality. So it is the way preachers put things, whether in arguing a point, narrating an incident, or making an appeal, that gives strength or weakness to a sermon. The doctrine is not his own, but its statement is, and in this his personality and originality will appear.

d. Or it may pertain to the delivery.

It would be well if more preachers would be more original, *i.e.*, would be themselves in the delivery of their sermons. No class of public speakers are less natural, in tone, utterance, and often in gesture than ministers of the gospel, who ought to be the most

natural. Few preach in the same tones and ease of manner in which they converse. There is a style of delivery very common to most of those who enter the pulpit, which is heard nowhere else, and ought to be avoided. Every preacher's voice and manner of delivery should be his own; revealing his personality and manhood.

In some or all of these, a proper originality may and should appear; not an originality which consists in doing things differently from others, or aims at independence of all recognized laws and customs, but which works by the best rules and laws until the preacher has mastered and made them his own. Thus he may become, not a mere conduit of other men's thoughts, but a fountain imparting freshness, delight, and life in every sermon he preaches.

There are three sources of intelligence: instruction, intuition, and inspiration. The first comes from without, the last from above, but intuition or instinct is our own aptitude in seeking or apprehending truth and the ways in which it may be applied or used. This power or gift should be cultivated and developed, as it makes our work eminently our own.

To preach great sermons, the preacher himself must be a great man; great not only in learning and attainments, but in character and nobility of soul.

IMITATION AND THE STUDY OF MODELS.

Closely connected with what has been said about Originality, is the matter of imitating and studying other men as models.

Young men are strongly tempted to imitate public speakers whom they admire. Some may do it unconsciously, while others do it purposely. It relates chiefly to the delivery of their sermons, but we insert what we have to say about it in this place as best fitting.

1. **Direct imitation is injurious**, and should be avoided.

(a) It is **destructive of your own personality**. You become the slave of the man you imitate instead of being your own master, or at least you are a mere copyist. God made you on your own model; not in the mould of somebody else. No man with proper self-respect can be content to be like an old book published with a new title and binding as the only change.

(b) You are **not competent to select the best models**. It is in the days of youth when this temptation comes; when judgment is not yet ripened, and immature or wrong ideas have not been corrected by experience. If a man is competent to decide who is the best model, he is competent to do without any, and to be himself.

(c) **You are apt to imitate their defects.** Eminent preachers have peculiarities which may become them, but would be out of place or ridiculous in any one else. Yet these defects or singularities are the points in which the imitation is chiefly apparent. Some peculiarity of pronunciation, posture, or apparel may be the chief point of resemblance. They "become John the Baptist only in raiment."

2. The careful study of models may be profitable.

(a) **Preachers** who have gained reputation and success should be heard and observed, so as to discover the secret of their strength, and also their points of weakness. If the latter are observed it will keep you from becoming mere copyists or imitators of them. Even poor preachers may be studied to learn what to avoid. To study men as well as books is a profitable employment, provided blind admiration does not usurp the place of good judgment.

(b) **Sermons**, whether heard or read, may possess excellencies after which your own may wisely be modelled. Carefully to examine the work of others may lead to great improvements in your own. The whole structure and arrangement of the sermon, as well as its language and style of composition,

should be carefully studied, if it be deserving of being a model.

Great care and caution are necessary here to avoid the charge of plagiarism or unauthorized use of the thoughts and especially the language of others. If you attempt to be brilliant at the expense of others you will find your own expense will be seven-fold. Many a man who has attempted to palm off the productions of others as his own, has ruined his reputation, both as a scholar and an honest man, beyond recovery. We may make the wisdom, learning, and thoughts of others our own by study and assimilation, and this is entirely lawful; but to reproduce whole sermons, or whole skeletons, or extended passages without giving credit is unjust to their authors, insulting to the intelligence of our hearers, and suicidal to ourselves. When extended quotations are made, credit should and readily may be given. This applies equally to *translated* passages.

(c) **Variety is profitable here.** Do not make any one man or his sermons your exclusive model. Study preachers, not only one of them. No man combines all excellencies in himself or in his sermons. There will be less danger of slavish imitation if you have a dozen models than if you have only one; and instead of destroying your own personality they will help you to develop it.

CHAPTER XI.

DECLAMATION OR DELIVERY.

THE fourth department of Homiletics is known as Declamation, or the delivery of the sermon from the pulpit. It covers the whole subject and science of Sacred Oratory or pulpit elocution. In some respects it is the chief thing, as all that precedes it, including Invention, Division, and Composition, are but preparatory to it.

In the delivery the end is reached, and the purpose for which sermons are prepared is fulfilled. An indistinct or uninteresting delivery will spoil everything, and make all previous study and labor of little or no account. It is here our artillery is brought into action, and to fail in this means defeat. Every man therefore who enters the pulpit is bound by the highest motives to give all diligence in cultivating his powers of speech, and in studying the recognized laws of sacred oratory.

The word **Oratory** is derived from the Latin noun *Os, oris*, meaning the mouth and also speech ; or from the verb *oro*, to speak, to pray, to plead. It includes all manner of public address pertaining to the min-

istry, and also the reading of the Scriptures, liturgy, and hymns at public services.

It is called **Sacred** Oratory not only because it pertains to sacred things, but because it has a character of its own, and differs in many respects from the oratory of other public-speaking professions. What may be proper at the bar, in legislative halls, or on the stage, may be altogether improper in the pulpit. The purposes of preaching are sacred and spiritual, and its style of oratory should always correspond with its purposes and ends.

At the same time there are habits and faults attached to pulpit oratory to which other public speakers are not tempted, and which ought to be pointed out and put away. There is a peculiar pulpit-tone, a sing-song pronunciation, a professional whine about many preachers, which, with other faults, need to be corrected, and require special rules, suggestions, and drill.

For these reasons Declamation or Sacred Oratory becomes not only a distinct but most important branch of homiletics and theological study. It has been objected that preaching is too sacred to be governed or restrained by rules or studied manner of speech; and affirmed that less mixture of art and greater simplicity of nature in the utterance of religious truth, will make it the most successful. But

this objection comes from a false conception of oratory as a pompous display of voice and gesture. The true design of sacred oratory, however, is the art of presenting religious truth in such a way as to please, convince, and persuade men to accept and obey the gospel. Certainly an ordinary sermon well delivered, will accomplish more than an abler sermon poorly delivered. We urge the study of rules of oratory, not to encourage special displays of voice and gesture, but to correct and restrain the tendency to such display.

Declamation or Oratory may be divided into three branches: the Voice, Utterance, and Gesture.

THE VOICE.

Next in importance to having something to say, is to say it well; and "a good voice" is a strong recommendation of any preacher. It has been called the organ of the soul, and through this instrument our sermons must be delivered. Concerning it we give the following directions:

I. Get a voice. A voice is something more than sound produced by the vocal organs. Other animals can utter sounds, but only man has a voice.

It must be carefully cultivated to produce such tones as will lay hold of the hearer, attract attention, and convey pleasing and forcible impressions.

A good voice makes itself easily heard, without apparent effort on the part of the speaker, and draws the congregation to like the preacher as well as the sermon. It carries with it the personality of the speaker, and helps him readily to express different shades of thought, giving variety of tone according to topic. It is a great mistake for any public speaker to neglect or pay no attention to proper voice culture.

2. **Three conditions** are necessary to have and maintain a good voice :

(a) **Physical.** Keep up your general health, as good voices rarely come from sickly bodies. Take care of your digestion, as inflamed throats are generally caused by disordered stomachs. Make your muscles storage-batteries of nerve force. Do not become physically exhausted by violent exercise or much talking before preaching.

(b) **Mental.** The voice is an index of the mind. If the mind is uncertain or unprepared, the voice will show it. It is the empty cart that rattles. Therefore intelligent persons generally have the best voices. The voice, more than dress, will tell of education and culture. Keep up your studies and general information. Let the voice have something worth saying, and generally it will say it well.

(c) **Spiritual.** Sincerity and earnestness reveal themselves in the voice. Spirituality of mind and

purity of heart give tones which cannot be counterfeited. It is the voice which most frequently reveals whatever of the "old Adam" remains in us. Be right and true, and the voice will be so. Be filled with the Spirit, with the love of Christ and of souls; for a lover's voice is always pleasant.

3. **Take care of it.** A cracked bell cannot be repaired. No instrument of music is more delicate or sensitive than the human voice. Avoid all patent nostrums, troches, and various throat remedies. Let no one but a skilled physician prescribe for so delicate and important an organ. Avoid strong coffee and strong drinks of every sort, because they make rough voices.

Do not wrap the neck with manifold coverings, thereby making it the most sensitive and tender part of the body. Yet do not unnecessarily expose the throat to colds or any disease, and never carelessly strain the vocal cords. Never go to your highest pitch in preaching, but at your best leave the impression you could go a tone higher. It saves the speaker's throat, and the ears of the people.

4. Use it **naturally**. Avoid all false, affected, and "professional" tones. Open the mouth and speak like a man. Do not muffle the pipes in the organ, but give the voice a chance to come out. Open the gates, and do not compel the sermon to force a passage.

Above all, keep out of the minor key, so customarily used in preaching, and speak in major tones.

When it is said the voice should be used naturally, it is not meant it should be in the way to which you have been accustomed. A natural voice is had only by careful drill and exercise in getting rid of the false voice we may have had from childhood. Our first elocutionary teachers were our mothers, nurses, and playmates, whose faulty tones and pronunciation we learned to imitate. It may take years to get rid of many evils they unconsciously did us in this respect. A natural voice is the voice coming by and through the organ of speech when in a natural or normal condition, and free from whatever is false or affected. To attain this after we have grown to manhood may be a difficult task, but is worth all it may cost.

5. Cultivate its powers and tones.

(a) Singing and reading aloud frequently will strengthen the voice. It is a mistake to think the voice is injured by frequent use. Musical instruments used every day have better tones than those used sparingly. It has been affirmed if ministers would preach every day, their voices (used naturally) would be the better for it. Great singers sing in public every day for long periods, and have frequent rehearsals in addition.

(*b*) Learn to explode the voice on the vowels and not on the consonants. For example, in uttering the word faithful, let the stress of voice be on the *a*, and not on the *th*, nor on the *f*. In the vowel sounds the throat is in a normal position, and no ordinary explosion of the voice can injure it.

(*c*) Cultivate especially the tenor or higher tones, because less common, most musical, and more clear—reaching farther and easier understood than very deep tones. If the voice needs to be deepened, a good exercise is found in repeating a sentence and dropping the voice a tone at the last word, until the lowest possible tones are reached.

(*d*) Accustom yourself to deep breathing, especially when walking and taking exercise in the open air. It will expel the foul air otherwise remaining in the recesses of the lungs and supply fresh air instead. It therefore not only gives strength and richness to the voice, but improves the general health and lessens any danger of pulmonary trouble. The more pure air a man can breathe, the stronger man will he be in his thinking and speaking, as well as in his general health. The brain as well as the lungs needs a good supply of fresh air.

6. The **pitch of voice** requires attention. By this is meant the key-note or starting tone with which we begin to speak or read. It should be

natural, *i.e.*, the tone produced by the vocal cords in their natural position. It should be a medium tone, neither too high nor too low, so as to allow an easy elevation or lowering of the voice, as the sentiment or meaning of the discourse requires. It should be subdued yet distinct, as this produces the most pleasing impression, and it is harder to get down than up after the start is made.

A proper pitch can generally be obtained by addressing those farthest from the speaker, care being taken to grade the pitch to the size of the building in which he speaks.

7. **Proper inflections** of the voice make speaking easy for the speaker and pleasant for the hearer, and give beauty and force to what is spoken or read. A monotonous style will make any discourse disagreeable and dull.

Inflection is not an arbitrary varying of tone from high to low, or low to high. This may result in a sing-song style which is worse than a monotone. Especially avoid flying from one extreme to the other, or always beginning a sentence on a high tone and descending as the breath gives out.

The best rule for proper inflection is to aim to express the sense and sentiment of what is uttered, and to produce those emotions the subject demands.

As a rule, the important word or part of a sentence, and positive assertions, should have the downward inflection, and the less important the upward inflection. In asserting a fact, even in a question (*e.g.*, Rom. viii: 35), the downward inflection should be used.

It is well to remember that inflection is the gesture of the voice, and should always be graceful and appropriate.

UTTERANCE.

Utterance is the putting forth of the voice to impart instruction or excite emotions by means of language. An uncertain, indistinct, or otherwise improper utterance, is not only a serious fault but a fatal defect in a public speaker.

Paul's admonition against speaking in unknown tongues, may also be applied to utterance: "Even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him

that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me." I. Cor. xiv: 7-11.

Attention is called to the following points, both in public reading and speaking:

1. Familiarity with language is essential.

We cannot properly pronounce words with the nature, meaning, and spelling of which we are not familiar. Hence the study of words, especially as to their derivation and use, is important. To this end we should read much, especially the Bible and the best authors, and keep a standard dictionary at hand so as to examine immediately the meaning and pronunciation of every unfamiliar word.

To pronounce correctly you must be sure you have the right word, and not say advice when you mean advise—nor froward when you mean forward—nor diseased when you mean deceased, etc. We have heard carved used for craved—reprobation for reputation—impudent for impotent—and other gross blunders, in reading the Scriptures. They arise either from inexcusable carelessness, or because the difference in the meaning of the words was not clearly understood. A single mistake of this sort spoils the entire service, and exposes the perpetrator to judgment without mercy.

2. Distinctness in articulation. By this is meant that every syllable, and even every letter,

especially the overlooked consonants (except they be silent letters), be given their due force.

It is this distinctness of articulation, rather than volume of voice, that makes any speaker to be easily heard and readily understood. It also aids in overcoming any tendency to read or speak too rapidly, or of "telescoping" or running syllables or words into each other, and at the same time prevents the drawling of words.

Distinctness may be acquired and cultivated by exercising the voice in reading aloud by syllables instead of words, and also by reading or speaking in whispers. In all such exercises, use freely your lips, tongue, and teeth.

3. **Proper accent** must be observed. This has been described as the soul of language, giving to it both feeling and truth. Accent is stress of voice or prominence put on a syllable. Every word of more than one syllable has an accented syllable, and mispronunciations generally occur through placing the accent on the wrong syllable. Even the meaning of words is sometimes dependent on which syllable the accent falls, *e.g.*, refuse, invalid, incense, etc. The rules of accent often appear arbitrary, and it is best to consult some recognized authority.

4. **Emphasis** is equally important. It is to the

sentence or paragraph what accent is to the word, and determines which word is to be made prominent. It is of value not only because it gives interest and animation to what is uttered, but often is necessary to the proper understanding of what is read or spoken, as the entire meaning may depend on the emphatic word. "Emphasis is exposition."

Emphasis is made by stress of voice, either in elevating or depressing it; or by unusual pause, slowness, or solemnity of expression.

There is a tendency in young preachers to make too many words emphatic, which destroys the purpose, use, and beauty of emphasis, and turns eloquence into mere rant. Many sentences, especially in preliminary statements, have no emphatic word; whilst at other times the stress of voice should extend over a number of words, as, *e.g.*, "Why will ye die?" "But where are the nine?" etc.; but as a general rule, emphasis should be given to but one word in a sentence. Where the same word is repeated in a clause or sentence, the emphasis never occurs on it twice, but is usually transferred to another word. It generally falls upon a noun or verb as the more important word,—but sometimes on the smaller words, like the prepositions in Rom. xi: 36.

Emphatic words are sometimes indicated by *italics*,

but this is not always the case in the Bible, where words not in the original language are indicated by being printed in italics.

The best guide is to study the meaning of the writer and find out what he wishes to say, and it will decide where emphasis should be placed.

5. Attention must be given to **pauses**. A pause in reading or speaking is meant to indicate the limits and relation of sentences and their parts, and when properly used is effective in bringing out the sense of what is spoken or read. They also aid the speaker by furnishing proper breathing places and rests for the vocal organs.

In reading these pauses are indicated by certain signs, known as the comma, semicolon, colon, and period,—the length of the pause being equal to the time in counting one, two, three, or four.

The only rules for pauses in speaking are, let them be natural and not artificial;—use them for breathing places and relief of the voice;—let them aid you in emphasis and giving effect to some important truth or appeal;—and rarely prolong them to an unusual extent.

6. Great care must be taken to **get rid of any provincialism** in pronunciation.

We have already alluded to the fact that those born and reared where the English and other

languages are intermixed, needed great care to get rid of certain expressions of language to which they were accustomed.

But greater care and pains must be taken to break from incorrect pronunciation and provincial tones of voice, as being much more offensive in a public speaker. If Demosthenes practised declamation with pebbles in his mouth to overcome a defect in his speech, surely they who intend to proclaim the gospel should use every possible means to compel lips and tongue to be not only correct, but agreeable in delivery.

Patience and perseverance in careful practice, before a competent instructor or faithful friend, will generally be rewarded with surprising success.

7. **Stammering** or **Lisping** in speech will be a serious hindrance to a successful ministry, and nothing should be left undone to conquer such defects or faults of utterance.

CHAPTER XII.

POSTURE AND GESTURE, METHODS OF DELIVERY.

GESTURE.

By gesture is meant the use and motions of the body as aids in expressing thought or arousing emotion. It includes the posture and movements of the speaker, the expression of his countenance, and the use of his arms and hands.

I. Posture and attitude.

By this is meant the way a minister presents himself before the congregation, and refers to his whole attitude and appearance, which are of no small importance. The manner of a well-bred man has a certain confident diffidence which is particularly attractive; it is the consciousness of power combined with respect for the presence and sensibilities of others. Of all men a clergyman should manifest good manners. His whole bearing should win the esteem of those to whom he ministers.

While not prescribing rules in this matter, we give the following suggestions:

Let the body be upright, whether in the stall, at the lectern, or in the pulpit. A loose, lounging,

lazy attitude is undignified, and looks irreverent. The body should rest easily on both feet, and not have one twisted about the other. It is ungraceful to place the hands on the corners of the desk, and appear to be propped up by the arms. An appearance of self-conscious importance, or a haughty and defiant attitude on the one hand; or a stooping, cringing one on the other, must alike be avoided. Also the habit of resting an elbow on the Bible, or leaning the body over the pulpit, needs only to be mentioned to be condemned. The body should maintain its erect position during the entire sermon, yet be flexible and move easily in facing all parts of the audience. All contortions of the body and restless moving to and fro should be avoided, not only because undignified and ungraceful, but as indicating a lack either of thought or of ready utterance.

2. The expression of the countenance.

The human face is the index of the soul, revealing and illustrating the thoughts and emotions within. It is of great aid to the preacher in expressing his thoughts, and to the hearers in understanding them. It reveals often more than the speaker wishes to disclose, and before he is aware, betrays the emotions he prefers to hide. It is a hard member to control, but the true orator seeks to make it his servant instead of his betrayer. Not

that the countenance is to assume what the heart does not feel, but its natural expressions can be so controlled as to make it an aid and never a hinderance to effective speech. There was a time, for example, when it was considered a mark of effective oratory for the preacher to shed tears at every pathetic passage in his sermon. A tear starting in the eye detracts nothing from the eloquence of speech, but it must rarely be allowed to come outside the gates. If you will notice how weeping distorts the face and cracks the voice, you will need no argument to convince you it is the foe, and not the ally, of eloquence. It is a mark of weakness to be suppressed and never encouraged.

So, too, no matter what feelings of righteous wrath and indignation may at times be stirred within, the preacher's countenance must show it as under control, and never as having the mastery over him.

Two features of the face are of special value in preaching:

a. The eye. The eye is the window of the body, through which the soul looks out and others look in. It is also an instrument of great power. It is said an earnest, steady, and fearless gaze will cower the fiercest beast; and we know it was the look of the Saviour's eye that made Peter go out

and weep bitterly. It is susceptible of varied expression, and its power to plead and persuade is well known.

The habit of keeping the eyes partly or wholly closed when speaking, is a serious fault. So too, a lifeless or vacant look of the eye detracts from eloquence. It indicates the speaker is indifferent to what he is doing, or is thinking about something else. It is an evil to be watched for and guarded against especially when preaching a sermon committed to memory.

It is a rare gift to be able to look directly into the eyes of the hearers without becoming confused. Where this cannot be done, it is safer to look at the congregation generally, and not at individuals. Care must be taken, however, not to look in vacancy, or over the heads of the congregation. We should look at their faces to catch their responsive look in return, as there must be "a pull from without, as well as a push from within," in effective oratory.

b. The lip. Next to the eye, the lip is the most expressive feature of the countenance, and by its lines and motions can aid in expressing and conveying feelings and thoughts. A loose, flabby lip not only prevents distinct articulation, but indicates want of information and lack in decision of char-

acter; whereas a firm lip reveals scholarly habits and strong convictions.

The lip of the speaker should not be hidden under an overhanging beard,—but its lines, movements, and varied expressions be distinctly seen by the audience. It not only facilitates deaf persons in understanding the preacher, but aids the voice in expressing and conveying the feelings of the soul. Whilst its movements must be natural and sincere, they can be cultivated and improved by proper attention and effort.

3. **The use of the arms and hands.** This is sometimes called action in oratory. Cicero advised “a bold and manly action of body,” and Demosthenes styled it the chief thing in oratory.

To allow the hands and arms to hang idly by the side during the delivery of a discourse is unnatural, and leaves the impression the speaker feels no interest in what he is saying. The whole body should manifest the emotions and enthusiasm of the soul, and this must be done chiefly by the arms and hands. By these utterance can be assisted, truths illustrated, and emotions aroused and expressed. To neglect gestures or to be awkward in their use, is to lack an element of great power in the delivery of sermons.

Too much gesticulation, like too rapid utterance,

is a serious fault in a public speaker. To keep the arms always in motion and flying at random indicates a bewildered mind rather than an earnest soul.

It is very difficult to lay down definite rules in the use of the arms and hands, because different men, with different temperaments and tendencies, will require different rules. Not only must some restrain what others should cultivate, but what would be proper and forcible in one may be ridiculous in another.

We venture, however, some suggestions :

(a) Gestures should be **from the shoulder** and not from the elbow. This prevents awkward, stiff, and disagreeable motions.

(b) Their motions should **be outward**, *i.e.*, from and not toward the body. The shoulders should not be thrown forward, but remain in position, while the arms act freely.

(c) Gestures should rarely be made **upward** when the face is toward the manuscript in reading a discourse, but generally should be in the same line as the look of the eye.

(d) Gestures should usually be made with **the right arm** or both arms, and rarely with the left arm only. Where both arms are used they should not be in parallel lines, except in the downward motions or in pronouncing the Benediction.

(e) **The fingers** should not be outspread, nor should they "make a fist" when the hand is closed. In pointing it is better to use the whole hand than the index-finger only. The hands should not vehemently strike each other nor any part of the body, the Bible, or the pulpit. Gestures of approbation, affirmation, and acceptance should be with the palm of the hand up; and those of negation, rejection, or distress, with the palm down.

(f) Gestures should be **graceful**. To this end the curved lines of the arm are preferable to the straight, except when speaking under strong emotion.

(g) Gestures should **correspond to the sentiment** or emotion expressed. Not that we should attempt to imitate in gesture what we are describing, unless it be only suggestive; but there should always be fitness and meaning in our motions. Deep feeling and strong assertions require strong and determined (but never wild nor violent) gestures, while gentler ones befit such parts as are mild or pathetic.

(h) Gestures should be **varied**. There is as much beauty and force in variety of gestures as in the tones of the voice, and sameness should be avoided in both. We should not always point upward when speaking of God or heaven, nor downward whenever we mention the grave. If we get a liking for any

particular gesture or attitude, we must guard against using it too often.

(i) Gestures must be **natural, not artificial**. Do not "make gestures," but let them come naturally as the subject prompts. Do not begin gesticulation too soon in the sermon; not until you have entered earnestly into its presentation. Never think about where they should come, but let them come of their own accord.

METHODS OF DELIVERY.

Three methods are employed in the delivery of sermons:

1. **Preaching from the manuscript**, commonly known as reading the sermon.

It has certain advantages, chief of which are the calm confidence the preacher feels when all he wishes to say is written out and placed before him, and the time and labor saved by not memorizing the manuscript.

The objections to it are many. It has no Scriptural authority or example, for no one can imagine our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount; or Paul on Mars' Hill, or before Felix, Festus, or Agrippa; or John the Baptist when preaching in the wilderness of Judea, reading their sermons. No other class of public speakers would attempt it, as the habit is

unknown in other fields of oratory. It is unpopular with the great majority of hearers, it cripples the preacher's oratory, and prevents the introduction of arguments or illustrations which the occasion often suggests.

The custom may have originated in the Middle Ages, when ministers read sermons from a Homiliary instead of preaching those of their own composition. It was brought into this country from England, the only country in Europe where the custom is allowed. Even there it had become so objectionable as early as 1674, that Charles II. gave orders "that the said practice, which took beginning with the disorders of the late times, be wholly laid aside, and that the aforesaid preachers deliver their sermons, both in Latin and English, by memory or without book, as being a way of preaching which his Majesty judgeth most agreeable to the use of all foreign churches, and the nature and intendment of that holy exercise." He also required "that the names of all such ecclesiastical persons as shall continue the present supine and slothful way of preaching be, from time to time, signified to me."

2. Preaching without manuscript, but with the entire sermon committed to memory.

The argument in favor of this method is that it combines the advantages of having a carefully

written sermon, yet delivered with the freedom of extempore speech. Most of the eminent preachers of our church in the mother-country, as well as some in England and Scotland, adopted this method. They were seldom required to preach more than one sermon each week, and therefore had the time required to memorize.

The objection to it is, it becomes simply a recitation rather than preaching, in which the mind is chiefly occupied with recalling words instead of urging truth and duty. It has a stiffness about it which makes the speaker awkward or unnatural. The mind is occupied in uncoiling the roll of memory rather than presenting the truth directly to the congregation. The preacher really is reading his sermon, although the manuscript is not before him, and he is under more constraint than if it were. The act of recalling what was written and the constant dread of a treacherous memory, prevent that freedom of manner essential to all true eloquence.

When a preacher has plenty of time to memorize what he has written, these difficulties may be largely overcome; but to attempt it constantly as the only method, would consume too much time and mental strength to be justified.

3. **Preaching unwritten sermons.** This is

sometimes called "preaching without notes," and by others extemporaneous preaching. This method consists in preparing the plan or skeleton of the sermon, in which not only its divisions, but also its proofs and illustrations are noted, yet leaving the language to be chosen at the time of delivery. It cannot always be called "preaching without notes," as the preacher may have the skeleton before him as an aid to memory. Nor is it strictly "extemporaneous preaching," as nothing short of some great emergency will justify preaching without previous study and preparation. It is extempore only in language.

The **objections** to this method are :

(a) The dread of failure in properly expressing what the preacher wishes to say.

(b) The danger of repeating what has been said, and of becoming diffuse and wearisome in multiplying words.

(c) The temptation to preach with insufficient preparation. Some men think because they have made a good division of their text or topic, they are ready to preach without further elaboration or study.

(d) The difficulty of reproducing the sermon, if desired. If some time has elapsed since its first delivery, it often requires more time and effort to recall it than to prepare another.

The advantages of this method, when it is well done, are very great.

(a) It is the true and natural idea of preaching, and is so recognized by nearly all congregations.

(b) It gives the preacher more time for study and research in his preparation. The mere act of writing will occupy several days each week,—and this additional time can be given to further investigation and study of the subject. No one should adopt this method with the idea of saving himself work in the preparation of sermons, but to have more time for such work.

(c) It allows the introduction of new thoughts and illustrations, as often the highest flights of eloquence come in the enthusiasm of preaching, or from the inspiration of an interested audience.

(d) Its continued practice is a mental discipline, and begets facility of expression which every preacher should have. Emergencies will arise when he is compelled to preach or speak with little preparation, and he can readily do so if accustomed to this method.

RULES CONCERNING THESE METHODS.

I. Every beginner should try repeatedly each of these methods of delivery, and then determine by experience which is best suited to his comfort and success.

2. Extemporaneous preaching should not be exclusively practised until the preacher, by written sermons, has gained a good command and style of language, and can be calm and collected in presence of a congregation.

3. Whichever method you employ, preach. If you use a full manuscript, do not be its slave but its master. Be sufficiently familiar with it not to be closely confined to it. Let your eye pass frequently from the manuscript to the people before you, so they may realize you are addressing them, and not merely reading something to them. This will give animation and force, of which no sermon ought to be deprived.

If you use the extemporaneous method, keep your brain, your heart, and your vocabulary full. Be on your guard against fluent emptiness. Do not rant, nor "give merely a talk," nor tell stories, nor repeat verses of hymns, but stick to your text and have something to say about it worth hearing ; and say it in such manner that the people will realize they are listening to a sermon. Not only let there be dignity in your delivery, but entire avoidance of the tones and manners of the stage, which extemporaneous preachers sometimes imitate.

4. Each method has its own manner of delivery. If you preach without notes, do not keep your

eyes on the Bible as if reading ; and if you read, do not attempt the same freedom of manner as in extemporaneous discourse. It is rather a ludicrous sight to see a public speaker swaying his hands over his head, or projecting his arms at right angles to his body, while his face and eyes are turned downward toward the manuscript before him.

5. When preaching from a skeleton or simple outline of thought, memorize it, whether you have it before you or not. This can be done in a half-hour, and gains that unity which ought to mark the delivery as well as the composition of the sermon. It avoids that disjointed utterance which mars the delivery of those who must stop and look for the next point of the sermon, after one has been finished, before they can proceed.

6. Under any method, let your manner of delivery be pleasing and attractive, so as to win the hearts of all before you ; keep your voice and movements under control ; avoid all pulpit tones and mannerisms ; and aim at the highest excellence in this important department of your preaching.

7. We quote three rules in delivery which deserve to be memorized by every preacher :

The first is attributed to Luther :

“Tritt frisch auf; Thu's Maul auf; Hoer bald auf.” Which may be translated, Get up freshly; Speak out freely; Conclude quickly.

The second is from an unknown source:

“Begin low: proceed slow;

Aim higher: take fire;

When most imprest, be self-possessed.”

The third is Cicero's famous rule that the manner of speech should correspond with the matter: “Parva submisce, modica temperate, magna granditer dicere.”

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUDING NOTES AND PRINCIPLES.

IN closing this volume, we add some general principles and suggestions on preaching, which should be kept in mind.

1. The design and purpose of preaching is the proclamation of the Gospel, and not merely the moral improvement of men. Whatever other ends it may accomplish, if a sermon fails either in the conversion of sinners to Christ, or the edification and establishment of believers in Him in their faith and life, it fails in that for which preaching was intended and appointed, and in which Christianity differs from all other world-religions.

2. At the same time the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation not only in the world to come, but in present deliverance from the power of sin and the devil. If, therefore, preaching fails in making men better and more holy in their walk and conversation, it manifests a weakness or some hinderance which needs immediate attention and correction.

3. If, however, we fail, after our best efforts, to

attract large congregations, let us remember the Master who sent us to preach will judge us, not by our success, but by our fidelity. And let us also keep in mind that a sermon may be great in qualities which are often lightly esteemed; that the highest test of a sermon is not its intellectuality, but spiritual power; not the excellence of its language or construction, but its effect and results; not in the number of people drawn to listen to it, but in the evangelical change it produces in them.

4. Every sermon should contain the three elements of instruction, illustration, and application, *i. e.*, it should have head, heart, and hands. It will then meet Cicero's threefold aim in public address, "*docere, delectare, flectere.*"

The usual division of sermons into doctrinal and practical is not wise. Doctrinal sermons ought to be practical,—and practical sermons should have doctrine as their basis. The Gospel should reveal the excellence of the law, and the law the absolute need of the Gospel.

5. A sermon should be intensive rather than extensive. To this end it should get at the heart of the text. Many sermons go round about the text or dwell on its insignificant points, but miss its central and main thought or purpose. Analysis

should often be employed, not so much to show how many things are in the text, as to clear away unimportant matter, and thus bring its main points more prominently into view. It is a good rule to find out which is the emphatic word in a text and fasten the sermon to it. Yet frequently the heart of the text is not expressed by any of its words, but consists in its general truth or thought.

6. Preaching should be positive rather than negative. The language of the law is "thou shalt not"; but in the Gospel it is "thou shalt." While truth is often made clear by contrast with the opposite error, we should speak more about the truth than about the error, and give less attention to the enemy and more to our own cause. While not negligent to warn of danger, take more pains and time to show the right way. Give the devil his due, but have more to say about the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. Do not waste time nor exhaust patience in proving what all admit. In typical or figurative sermons do not scatter the mind with trifling, unimportant, or merely curious resemblances or comparisons, but consider only such as help the understanding, illustrate the truth, or convey practical and useful lessons.

8. Keep up your line fences. Let your divisions

really divide, and the different parts of the sermon be really separate. The old rule is worth remembering :

“ *Introductio ne sit abstracta ;*
Propositio ne sit obscura ;
Divisio ne sit confusa ;
Conclusio ne sit diffusa.”

9. Analysis and synthesis belong not only to the mode of division, but go together and follow each other in the entire making of the sermon, and their power should be cultivated by every preacher. Lord Macaulay describes the strength of Aristotle that he was without a rival in analysis and combination. “ No philosopher ever possessed, in an equal degree, the talent either of separating established systems into their primary elements, or of connecting detached phenomena in harmonious systems. He was the great fashioner of the intellectual chaos: he changed its darkness into light, and its discord into order.”

By analysis and synthesis is meant the separating and combining powers of the mind, two powers which are indispensable in the man who wishes to instruct and influence others.

10. Do not beat out the gold too thin. Sermons are often greater in what they suggest than in what they say. Great truths cannot be fully presented,

and sublime facts cannot be wholly described. Something should be left either to the imagination or to the inner sense of the hearer, and it will be more impressive than if we attempt to show its boundary limits.

11. Every sermon should have a climax. It should "go from strength to strength," and there should be one point where the argument culminates, and the eloquence comes to a focus. It will give unity to the composition, clearness to the theme, intensity to the speaker and hearer, and a lasting impression when the service is over. To this end the sermon should not be much prolonged after the climax has been reached.

12. While the personality of the preacher should appear in all his sermons, personalities should appear in none.

By this we mean no preacher should spoil his sermons by bringing into them personal grievances or indulging in pulpit scoldings. It is not only unbecoming, but injurious. It injures the Gospel you ought to preach, and puts yourself at a great disadvantage. The extent of your trouble is the importance you attach to it yourself. Never show you are hurt when you are hit, for men will soon stop hitting those they cannot hurt.

Here also we may state sermons should not be

preached at congregations, but to them. The pastor should be the counsellor, not the critic, of his people. As such he may reprove and rebuke with all authority, but it should be in that tone and manner which will not separate him from those whom he admonishes.

13. That preaching may be successful, the preacher must know and understand the people to whom he preaches. The more he knows of their history, situation, temptations, and sorrows; and likewise of their characters, prejudices, sentiments, and peculiarities, the better will he know how to attract, convince, and persuade them to accept and obey the word preached. Hence ordinarily a faithful pastor preaches the best when before his own people. Congregations differ, and therefore sermons which are effectual at some places, altogether fail at others.

14. Sermons may be repeated, provided the process of preparation is gone over again in the mind of the preacher. We may apply Dr. O. W. Holmes' remark to sermons: "They are not like postage-stamps, to be used only once." Some sermons are growths, rather than ripe fruits. They grow on the mind of the preacher with a new development each time they are repeated. This gives them a new interest, the same as a new sermon, and they may be preached a second time to the edification of the same congregation.

But the frequent repetition of sermons should be avoided. It becomes simply a repetition or a recitation, and not a preaching of the living Word. The fire has gone out, and cannot be rekindled unless the whole process be gone over with which it was first started. And that is often more difficult than the preparation of an entirely new sermon.

For a minister to preach over sermons as they were prepared ten or more years before, is a confession that he has not grown in homiletical skill nor in the accumulation of material, within that time. The custom, therefore, except in special cases, is as unwise for the preacher as it is unjust to the congregation.

15. While we dispense the Gospel by our sermons, our sermons should be indispensable. That is, our sermons should be so instructive and impressive that our congregations should think they could not do without them. This may seem too high an ideal, but it is worthy of our aim. And that which will make them indispensable, is to give men what they feel they need. Underneath in the human heart there is a desire to know the truth, and to have the questions of life answered which are continually rising. We may not be able to tell anything new, but the old truth, the truth many are perfectly familiar with, they will be glad to hear, if it be told in a fresh and interesting way. A bright, clear, and attractive speaker

will always have an audience, especially if in him people perceive a loving heart and noble character. A man who is no great thinker or great scholar, may yet present the ever new things of the Gospel so that even the most intelligent will be glad to hear his preaching, and will feel they miss something whenever they are absent. To gain this, sermons must be full, not of chaff, but of wheat. Men will gather where they believe they get what they need and what they cannot do without.

16. Preachers must not be afraid of unpopular truths. We are to do the preaching God bids us, and not that which men prefer. We are the servants of God, not men; and must seek to please Him, not them. We must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, "whether men will hear or whether they will forbear." No doctrine must be omitted or slighted because unpopular in the age or community where we reside. If Ananias fell because he kept back part of the price of land, what will be the judgment on those who keep back part of the price of our great redemption?

17. The order given in Ezekiel xxxvii. reveals the essential elements and proper order in the construction of a sermon: first there must be the sermon-skeleton, "the bones came together, bone

to his bone"; then come the sinews, flesh, and skin, in its elaboration, development, and composition; but also over all must fall the baptism of the Spirit, the breath of heaven, to make it a living power,—and the ideal sermon is complete.

HOMILETICAL RULES FROM AUGUSTINE.

1. Preaching must be founded on and adhere to the Word of God.
2. Truth is more important than oratory. Pay more attention to *sapientia* than to *eloquentia*.
3. Sin and grace, the fall and redemption, are the great themes of sermons.
4. Make the truth plain, then pleasing, then moving.
5. The preacher must possess spiritual insight to discern and apply the truth.
6. The heart makes the theologian.
7. The preacher must be the master, not the servant, of his words.
8. As soon as the preacher ascertains he is understood, he should pass to another topic.
9. The life of the preacher is the hidden power of the sermon.
10. The preacher should avoid faults of conduct more than faults of oratory.

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